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"Fight the power"- a beats, rhymes, and life approach : a project
based upon an investigation at Beats, Rhymes and Life**

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Maria Camila Camacho Garrido
How Does Hip Hop Serve as a
Catalyst for Collective Resistance?
“Fight the Power” –
a Beats, Rhymes, & Life Approach

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores what elements of social justice, Hip Hop, and therapy the Oakland, California based agency Beats, Rhymes, & Life, Inc. (BRL) engages in to ignite Collective Resistance among its members, youth, and the outside community. The study utilized a mix of both narrative and phenomenological approaches throughout. In total, twelve participants were interviewed, however, only six participants were included for the purpose of this research and ranged from teaching artists, clinicians, community members, and leaders of BRL. Each participant was asked a series of questions regarding (1) Hip Hop, (2) Oppression and Power, and (3) Collective Resistance along with exploring the role BRL plays throughout those spaces. The narratives demonstrated that by tapping into the power of Hip Hop culture; using and providing space for authentic exploration and solidification; and having awareness of positionality, thought, and oppressive systems at play; individuals are able to provide ideas and solutions on how to challenge oppressive institutions through by acting upon the common goal of goodness for all and ride on transformative love.

Because the study focuses on Collective Resistance, writing the paper itself was a participation in the movement of resistance against the norm. By engaging in code-switching between an academic voice and the voice of my roots in the communities which I belong to, it was my small way to “fight the power.”

**HOW DOES HIP HOP SERVE AS A CATALYST FOR COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE?
“FIGHT THE POWER” – A BEATS, RHYMES, & LIFE APPROACH**

A project based upon an investigation at Beats,
Rhymes and Life, submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Social Work.

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2016

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Primero que todo le quiero dar gracias a Dios por esta oportunidad tan impresionante que me ha dado...porque me ha retado de una manera donde las palabras no justifican el crecimiento y la aventura que El y yo hemos tomado. Esta bendición me ha enseñado y ha quitado el velo de mis ojos donde no soy un títere más; donde no soy una persona que se queda neutral y ya – al contrario, he aprendido en como continuar, expandir, e impartir el amor por Dios y el amor hacia nuestro prójimo. Esta experiencia me ha enseñado sobre la pasión profunda que siempre he sentido por la justicia espiritual y social; y ha crecido de una manera donde a veces pienso que estoy es en un sueño. Gracias, infinitas gracias a mi familia – a mi Papa, mi Mama, Vivi y Ed, Tian...nosotros llegamos a este país solos llenos de sueños, nervios, preguntas, valentía, incertidumbre, y amor. Los amo, sin ustedes, sin su apoyo, y sin sus enseñanzas no hubiese podido enfrentar mis miedos, mis retos, y tomar un salto a las oportunidades que el Señor presento. Somos un equipo, somos una familia, y este logro es en honor a ustedes mi hermosa familia. A mis Abuelitos (abuelita Merida, abuelito Angel, abuelito Camacho, y abuelita Clara), mi familia extendida, mis amados amigos que llevo en el corazón cada día, y a cada persona que sembró semillas de amor, sabiduría, y valentía en mi corazón – su apoyo ciertamente nunca lo olvidare. Este logro también es para ustedes. Por último, te amo mi Colombia, estas en mi sangre y te extraño tierra hermosa – el orgullo de ser Latina y colombiana es algo que nada ni nadie se podrá robar.

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Amor y Paz para todos. Nunca paremos de disfrutar la vida que Dios nos ha dado. Nunca paremos de olvidar la humanidad que nos conecta a todos. Los quiero.

ONE LOVE. UN AMOR.

First of all, I want to thank God for the great opportunity He has given me in which I've been challenged in a way where words don't do justice to the experience, nor to the journey He and I have taken on. This blessing has taught me and removed the veil from my eyes where I'm not one more puppet in this world; I'm not one more person that decides to be neutral and that's it – on the contrary, I've learned how to continue, expand, and spread love for God and love for everybody. This experience has taught me about the profound passion I've always felt in my heart for social and spiritual justice; it has grown in a way where sometimes I think I'm in a dream. Thank you, infinity thank yous to my familia – Papi, Mami, Vivi & Ed, Tian...we came to this country alone full of dreams, nervousness, questions, bravery, uncertainty, and love for one another. I love you...without you, without your support, and without your teachings, I would not have been able to face my fears, challenges, and jump into the opportunities God presented. We are a team, we are family, and this achievement is in honor of you my beautiful familia. To my Grandparents (abuelita Merida, abuelito Angel, abuelito Camacho, & abuelita Clara); to my extended family; to my beloved friends who I carry in my heart every single day (my family of choice), and to each person that has planted seeds of love, wisdom, and bravery in my heart – I will truly never forget your support. This achievement is also for you. Lastly, I love you mi Colombia, you are in my blood and I miss you my beautiful country – the pride of being Latina and Colombiana is something that nothing or no one will ever steal.

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Love and Peace everybody. Let's never stop enjoying and pursuing the life God has given us. Let's never forget the humanity that joins us all. Love you all.

ONE LOVE. UN AMOR.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

I believe Hip Hop is authentic social action. Raw symphonic authenticity. From graffiti, to emceeing (or rapping), from DJing, to break dancing, all encompassed in knowledge and unity; these elements capture the essence of Hip Hop symphony – of Hip Hop's culture where artistic expressions fight the powers of oppression. One of the pioneers of graffiti, Phase 2, said “I grew up in an atmosphere where we recognized we were being robbed of knowledge of culture and knowledge of self...We created an art form that came up from our supposedly insignificant existences and now it's everywhere in the world” (Hager, 2014). This statement captures the social unrest and marginalization people of color were going through, and the calling for individuals to stand up against their “insignificant existence” by printing their powerful voices on society's map for good.

Before the birth of Hip Hop in the 70's, gang violence in the Bronx was prevalent, selling drugs was rampant, economic scarcity was alive, and frustration and weariness was heavy among black and brown communities. In a society where order is guided by power dynamics, white supremacy, and inequality, those oppressed and marginalized often actively engage in liberation work in order to counteract these damaging forces. Paulo Freire (1970) conceptualized liberation work with the notion of praxis, which is defined as a “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” In other words, systemic oppression cannot stay in the levels of awareness and understanding; they need to be set in motion for change to happen (Beitin & Allen, 2005). Whether it is through a beat, a rap, a dance, or a piece of art, the artistic liberatory aspects of Hip Hop have allowed individuals to become activists within themselves and among their communities; in a way, Hip Hop is a representation of unapologetically standing up against

adversity and reclaiming hope through collective resistance and liberation. The roots of the powerful cultural movement imbedded in Hip Hop, came as a form of social justice and resistance against the oppressive systems and permissive violence against black and brown communities. Over the past forty years, Hip Hop has emerged as a central form of social action, allowing the oppressed relentlessly confront the oppressor where authenticity is encouraged and justice is at the forefront; which is why Hip Hop is more than just a genre of music encapsulated to one group, it is a communal movement that continues to push the boundaries for change.

In Lupe Fiasco's song "Hip Hop Saved My Life," he raps about a young black man trying to make it out of the streets through hip hop rather than through selling drugs, getting involved in gangs, or doing anything else that would put him in prison. For many, that's what Hip Hop represents – a means to survive. *"He picked up his son with a great big smile/Rapped every single word to the newborn child/Then he put him down and went back to the kitchen/And put on another beat and got back to the mission of/Get his momma out the hood, put her somewhere in the woods/Keep his lady looking good, have her rolling like she should/Show his homies there's a way other than that flippin' yay/Bail his homie out of jail, put a lawyer on his case/Throw a concert for the school, show the shorties that it's cool/Throw some candy on the Caddy, chuck the deuce and act a fool/Man it feels good, when it happens like that/Two days from going back to selling crack, yessir"* – Lupe Fiasco, "Hip Hop Saved My Life".

BRL is an agency located in Oakland, California that serves youth between the ages of 12-24, whose mission is to "improve mental health and social outcomes among marginalized youth by using hip hop as a catalyst for positive change and development" (Beats Rhymes and Life, 2015). By looking into the organization's therapeutic foundation derived from Hip Hop culture, the experiences faced by people of color and minorities regarding social and systemic

oppression, and the outcomes in terms of mental health and community-based healing; therefore, this qualitative study addresses the question: How Does Hip Hop Serve as a Catalyst for Collective Resistance? The study utilized a mix of both narrative and phenomenological approaches throughout. In total, twelve participants were interviewed, however, only six participants were included for the purpose of this research and ranged from teaching artists, clinicians, community members, and leaders of BRL. Each participant was asked a series of questions regarding (1) Hip Hop, (2) Oppression and Power, and (3) Collective Resistance along with exploring the role BRL plays throughout those spaces. The narratives demonstrated that by tapping into the power of Hip Hop culture; using and providing space for authentic exploration and solidification; and having awareness of positionality, thought, and oppressive systems at play; individuals are able to provide ideas and solutions where maybe the system won't change but the collective approach will.

This study is imperative due to it will hopefully name the misused powers and privileges at play targeting marginalized populations, especially youth of color; name the *force* within collective resistance; what spaces serve as catalysts for liberatory work; the essential piece of community/family/social action imbedded in Hip Hop; and the continuation of consciousness and self-awareness of our roles in the intersectionalities at play.

Lastly, Collective Resistance merged with the Hip Hop does not seem to be possible without authenticity and the connection of heart and mind to express what's going on not only at an individual level, but at social and systemic levels as well. Hip hop gave a voice to those being marginalized, oppressed, and rejected by society, especially for people of color and minorities. It also provided the opportunity to confront and walk in a space to express oneself creatively, explore without fear, be vulnerable in private or public, and tap into emotion and thought. With

Hip Hop you're down to have a good time, but also down to keep it real; a moment in time where one can put out not only internal understanding, but what is witnessed in society in the freedom of expression – an experience transcending from individual to community. In the Eurocentric models of social work and white supremacist roots imbedded in the US, it seems then that Hip Hop is more of the exception and not the rule...which is where collective resistance begins: standing against the norm to push for freedom.

*“Freedom isn't free
But I still, I still believe in my freedom
So my mind can see
Please let me be free, please let me
Freedom” - Lecrae ft. N'Dambi, “Freedom”*

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Before the birth of Hip Hop in 1973, gang violence and drug sales in the Bronx were rampant, economic scarcity was alive, and frustration and weariness was heavy among black and brown communities. In a society where order is guided by power dynamics and inequality, those oppressed and marginalized often actively engage in liberation work. Paulo Freire (1970) conceptualized liberation work with the notion of praxis, which is defined as a “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” In other words, systemic oppression cannot stay in the levels of awareness and understanding; they need to be set in motion for change to happen (Beitin & Allen, 2005). Whether it is through a beat, a rap, a dance, or a piece of art, the liberation aspects of Hip Hop have allowed individuals to become activists within themselves and among their communities, by unapologetically standing up against adversity and reclaiming hope through collective resistance. The roots of the powerful cultural movement imbedded in Hip Hop, came as a form of social justice and resistance against the oppressive systems among mainstream and permissive violence against black and brown communities. Since then, the soul and message of Hip Hop has strongly resonated with oppressed people around the world (Sommer, 2014). Over the past forty years, Hip Hop has emerged as a central form of social action, allowing the oppressed relentlessly confront the oppressor.

Hip Hop Therapy (power of hip hop, benefits, “one mic,” 4 elements, RAP)

Studies have shown ethnic minorities, specifically black and brown people, are more likely to grow in “chaotic societal and community environments” organized by structural racism where history, ideology, public policies, institutional practices, and culture interact to maintain a racial hierarchy. This racial hierarchy then allows the privileges associated with whiteness and

the disadvantages associated with color to adapt and endure over time (Kelly, Mynigo, Wesley, & Durham, 2013). The exposure to such systems impacts individuals' mental, emotional, and physical well-being in which higher levels of depression, anxiety, and trauma are prevalent (Alvarez, 2012).

Mckie (2014) points out “hip-hop provides individuals with a sense of empowerment and self-knowledge that could be exploited to help people tackle their own psychological problems. There is an intrinsic awareness of issues connected with mental health in many forms of hip-hop art.” Hip Hop, which has emerged as the voice of oppressed communities fighting racism and marginalization by systems of white dominated privilege, has provided a space in which healing is ignited through the power of artistic expression and co-creation of individual and social authenticity. By reclaiming identity catalyzed in the power of voice within Hip Hop, a sense of structure emerges, vulnerability is encouraged, and connection is established; therefore, facilitating exploration of self and environment (Hadley & Yancey, 2012). In addition, the power of voice sustains mental and emotional sanity in repressive realms where violence and unemployment is prevalent, by the ways in which naming seizes the moment to be heard, validated, self-empowered and self-expressed. Hip Hop has also been associated with healing not only through the power of voice in lyrics, but through the power of movement within the elements of beat, flow, and dancing. The various forms of movement prove to be restorative specifically for individuals “inhabiting urban spaces that often constrict movement and are heavy-laden with disproportionate economic burdens,” (Hadley & Yancey, 2012, pxxxii). Forman (2002), through the concept of “spatial logics,” states Hip Hop serves as mode of expressive freedom by reconfiguring space, perception, and lived reality.

When active liberatory work takes place, different levels of pain, loss, grief, joy, anger, love, can be addressed and the journey of restoration commences. Therefore, Hip Hop has represented an explicit therapeutic intervention in which its cultural and artistic elements are powerful forms of expressive modalities. The elements invite and encourage exploration of inner self in weaknesses and strengths; they provide spaces that “free up ways of expressing the self and acquiring new, positive, and effective ways of being empowered,” (Hadley & Yancey, 2012); as the individual begins their own therapeutic process, an inherent collective catharsis happens. Hip hop therapy is especially powerful among youth of color and others who are fighting the same systems of oppression today. Due to the hierarchy imbedded in the client-therapist relationship in which the therapist typically takes the role of authority, hip hop therapy can aid in establishing a therapeutic alliance of empathy and relatedness regardless of culture (Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

There are several ways Hip Hop serves as a therapeutic vehicle; for example, listening, creating, improvising, and performing provide venues of free association and exploration. Such therapeutic forms lead to unblocking repressed memories/trauma/pain; they push for individuals and societies to face themselves and address the “levels of anguish previously unrecognized.” In return, the denied sense of self is brought up to the surface. An opportunity to be real, raw, and vulnerable without judgment is created, which leads to self-awareness and self-growth in a system manipulating, shutting down, and “opaquing” the collective voice of those marginalized; therefore, Hip Hop serves as a “mic” or an outlet against oppression and repression (Hadley & Yancey, 2012). One of the essential elements of Hip Hop is emceeing; rap lyrics and the way they are delivered in motion, embody a cultural process and depict the context of what the artist is witnessing. By the therapist facilitating client analysis/interpretation of the song and its lyrical

relevance to social realities, a door opens to boost the self-worth of disempowered clients; resistance to systems of oppression is not only being experienced internally by the individual, but between two bodies who are going against more westernized forms of therapy (Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

In this context, agencies such as Beats, Rhymes, and Life have incorporated hip hop as a form of therapy in order to mitigate not only stress and depression, but benefit overall mental health stability. (For a review of BRL therapeutic programs, see Clowdus (2016); Padilla (2016); and Schwartz (2016); For a review of BRL's therapeutic academic programs, see Fogelson (2016) and Laris (2016).) The research beginning to study hip-hop therapy suggest that this approach has a significant impact on mental wellbeing and healing, treatment engagement, and resilience. Reviews of hip hop therapy explain how the elements imbedded within the culture serve as means to spark empowerment, reclaiming identity, self-awareness, resistance, community healing, and empathic connections (Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

While there is research on the impact of hip hop therapy as an individual intervention, there is minimal literature examining Hip Hop Therapy as a form of collective resistance. The following pages of this literature review explore the notion of collective resistance and its elements. However, the remainder of this paper will code-switch, and at times, utilize a voice that is not commonly accepted in academic circles. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) states oppressed groups are countlessly put in situations of being listened to only if their ideas are framed in a manner, in a language, comfortable and familiar to a dominant group. Such requirement frequently changes the meaning of the oppressed group's ideas and functions to elevate the dominant group's ideas. In the service of elevating the ideas of the members of the Hip Hop

community, including myself, I will intentionally engage in code-switching, using the voices from within and the narrative process that shapes our Hip Hop community.

On Understanding Power

“No one man should have all that power/The clock’s ticking, I just count the hours/Stop tripping, I’m tripping off the power/21st-Century Schizoid Man” (Power, West, 2010). From academic scholars such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire, to Black Lives Matter cofounder activist Alicia Garza, to Hiphoppas such as KRS-One, Nas, Ana Tijoux, and Public Enemy, all unite to engage in **collective resistance**. Before engaging in what collective resistance entails, it is important to understand what power is. Hunjan and Petitt (2011) argue there is no single definition of power since it can take several shapes. For example, power can be understood as both a positive and negative force, as a resource, and as something exercised by individuals and groups. Our relationship to power affects our decisions, our access to knowledge, and our sense of self among systems of power. In society, power creates hierarchical structures, which then give birth to marginalization and oppression. In order to challenge power, one must recognize, name and shift socialized structures. Paulo Freire (1970) brings the action of challenging power through the process of the oppressor versus the oppressed. First, the oppressed must actively confront their oppressors through the process of creating consciousness in naming the institutional powers at play. Second, by confronting coercive, oppressive powers, transformation can begin to take place in the development of skills and exchange of knowledge between the oppressed and oppressors. Third, the shared experiences and dialogue within the roles of teachers and learners, structures of oppression are addressed leading to proactivity, which then lead to liberation. By allowing “liberatory education” to take place, the humanity and worth of all are

brought to the forefront of social order. For liberation to be a social movement, there has to be a collective force igniting collective action; thus, enter collective resistance.

On Collective Resistance

bell hooks (1994) provides a starting point to understanding resistance. She states “resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces. Resistance that is random and isolated is clearly not as effective as that which is mobilized through systemic politicized practices of teaching and learning” (hooks, 1994). In other words, collective resistance could be expressed as a shared active, conscious opposition against dominant/oppressive systems of power.

In Rivera’s (1999) study, experiences around resistance strategies is depicted through the stories of six Puerto Rican and Dominican young women who engage in “collective determination” to push back against oppression in relationship to their schools, neighborhoods, and home. Throughout the study, Rivera points out the conflicting relationships, situations, and institutions the young women encountered regarding race, gender, social class, and cultural intersectionality. The researcher mentioned how going through the process of “liberatory resistance” as belief and practice, ignited movement towards determination of self and collective freedom (Rivera, 1999). Understanding our social locations along with the intersectionalities of identity is a necessity in order to know how to engage in the power of resistance at individual and collective levels. By practicing resistance reactively and proactively, marginalized people can better address systems of oppression and walk on the path towards collective liberation. Francoso (2013) touches on the power of resistance as an artistic movement to call out legacies of colonization and as movement to construct new visions of cultural identity. The research

focuses on music and other forms of artistic expression as vehicles of resistance where there is a reclaiming of self in the context of community; especially through “urban ceremonies” and musical performances which allow individuals to think critically of themselves, promote their cultural affirmation, and build on their “indigenous cultural thought” (Francoso, 2013). In the end, the researcher concludes resistance as, “the use of “ceremonies” where movement participants can construct, reclaim, and disseminate decolonial identities and ideas (Francoso, 2013, p284).” By looking at the power of music and artistic expression as collective resistance against systems of oppression, and then Hip Hop as cultural movement fighting for social justice; there is an interconnected relationship between both forces in which those disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed have a space and a voice to challenge injustice as well as proclaim their authenticity internally and externally.

On Collective Resistance and Hip Hop

Hip Hop scholar, KRS-One depicts Hip Hop as a united culture with various forms of expression of collective urban lifestyle and collective consciousness; it is a perceptual ability that causes one to self-create and raises one’s self-worth (KRS-One, 2015). Instead of the oppressors calling the shots, Hip Hop is challenging systems of marginalization by not letting dominant elite groups take control – or in other words, resisting. *“It’s a start, a work of art/To revolutionize make a change nothing’s strange/People, people we are the same/No we’re not the same/Cause we don’t know the game/What we need is awareness, we can’t get careless/You say what is this?/My beloved lets get down to business/Mental self defensive fitness/(Yo) bum rush the show/You gotta go for what you know/Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be/Lemme hear you say/Fight the power/Fight the power/We’ve got to fight the powers that be”* (Fight the Power, Public Enemy, 1990).

The confrontation of oppressive systems is also addressed within the Hip Hop community; for example, Female emcee Queen Latifah, raises self-consciousness among females by rapping against the disrespect women experience in society, addressing issues of street harassment, domestic violence, and demeaning slurs; *“I walked past these dudes when they passed me/One of ‘em felt my booty, he was nasty/I turned around red, somebody was catching the wrath/Then the little one said, “Yeah me, bitch,” and laughed/Since he was with his boys, he tried to break fly/Huh, I punched him dead in his eye/And said, “Who you calling a bitch?”/[Hook] U.N.I.T.Y., U.N.I.T.Y. that’s a unity (You gotta let him know)(You go, come on here we go)U.N.I.T.Y.,Love a black woman from (You got to let him know) Infinity to infinity (You ain’t a bitch or a ho)” (U.N.I.T.Y, Latifah, 1993).*

A reflection on Hip Hop lyrics and community leaders’ messages suggest unity emerges as a central aspect of collective resistance. Archbishop Desmond Tutu also talks about the power of unity and standing up together through the spirit of Ubuntu, “It is to say, ‘My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life. These words describe an ideal for life in community. When we provide a safe space for one another, when we encourage one another, when we find space to collaborate – we create community, better yet – Ubuntu” (Tutu, 2015). The power of human connection enhances a joining of knowledge, voice, spirit, and feeling which provides collectivity where social justice and social action, can be put into motion in order to confront a larger oppressive group and engage in restoration as a community. The notion of unity and spirit of Ubuntu as collective resistance not only is portrayed in lyrics and concepts, but in my personal life too. As a Colombian, Latina woman, the essence of collective resistance resonates strongly. I, within my own people at home and here in the US, think on how as a people we continue to fight against political corruption, colonialism,

inequality, social injustice, etc. For example, when I'm able to interpret for another clinician who is working with a Hispanic/Latino family or when I'm serving other Hispanics/Latinos and we speak in our *own* language, not accommodating to the agency but the agency accommodating to those being served, there's a claiming of identity and resistance in the power of unity through strength in numbers. Female MC Ana Tijoux expresses in her song "Somos Sur," ("We are South"): "*Soñamos en grande que se caiga el imperio/Lo gritamos alto, no queda más remedio/Esto no es utopía, es alegre rebeldía/Del baile de los que sobran, de la danza tuya y mía/Levantarnos para decir "ya basta"/Ni África, ni América Latina se subasta/Con barro, con casco, con lápiz, zapatear el fiasco/Provocar un social terremoto en estate charco.*" Through the power of words, dance, and rhythm, she intentionally is telling the oppressors "we are going to provoke a social earthquake against your corruptive dominance, imperialism, and oppression, and we are going to do it by any means whether you like it or not." Another form of a collective movement standing up against dominant systems is Black Lives Matter. Activist and co-founder Alicia Garza stated, "Love is at the heart of Black Lives Matter. The sustaining power of that love and compassion opens possibilities not only for rebellion but for transformation" (van Gelder, 2015). Garza pointed out without love, there is no vehicle to stand for justice and pursuit transformative liberation.

"They wanna say it's a war outside, bomb in the street/Gun in the hood, mob of police/Rock on the corner with a line for the fiend/And a bottle full of lean and a model on the scheme uh/These days of frustration keep y'all on tuck and rotation (Come to the front)/I duck these cold faces, post up fi-fie-fo-fum basis/Dreams of reality's peace/Blow steam in the face of the beast/Sky could fall down, wind could cry now/Look at me motherfucker I smile/[Hook] And (I love myself)/When you lookin' at me, tell me what do you see?/(I love myself)

Ahh, I put a bullet in the back of the back of the hand of the bully/(I love myself) Illuminated by the hand of God, boy don't seem shy/(I love myself) One day at a time, uhh” (i, Lamar, 2015).

Professor Cornell West states, “my basic aim in life: to speak the truth to power with love so that the equality of everyday life for ordinary people is enhanced and white supremacy is stripped of its authority” (West, 1994). Social transformation occurs with critical and liberating dialogue united in resistance – a side by side battle within self and community, and outside self and community. Dialogue, reflection, action...the lyrical element of Hip Hop is liberation work within itself. The master is the beat, the flow its pupil – the beat and the flow have a conversation, a dialogue, which then sparks and opens a window of reflection and consciousness among other minds and hearts and therefore; leading to action through collective resistance. When the master and the pupil, when creativity joins reality, when the individual and Hip Hop enter that vulnerability through artistic dialogue (beat, rap, dance, graffiti); conscious liberation from oppression and marginalization take place.

Goals of the Study

The goal of this study is to explore how Beats, Rhymes, and Life, Inc. engages in Collective Resistance through the lens of Hip Hop, Oppression, and the ideas behind Resistance and Collective Resistance. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand how BRL members and community members connected to the agency define and view Hip Hop; to explore the participants’ conceptualization and experiences with power and oppression; and to understand the way BRL community members define and experience or witness collective resistance. Along with each theme, I will aim to learn how the participants’ work at/with BRL influences their understandings around the mentioned themes - Hip Hop, Power and Oppression, and Collective Resistance.

This study is the first step of an ongoing process exploring BRL and the factors igniting Collective Resistance; the limits of the current analysis will be outlined throughout the discussion section and recommendations for the next steps of the research will be included.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study explores the ways which the Oakland, California based agency Beats, Rhymes, & Life, Inc. (BRL), understood as a community-based intervention program, serves as a catalyst for *collective resistance* from the perspectives of staff (both clinicians and artists), community members, and program supporters. The recruiting process was interesting due to the fact I was living in Atlanta, GA and the study took place in Oakland, CA; therefore, the main liaison between the participants and myself was my thesis advisor, Dr. Mamta Dadlani.

While searching for literature related to Hip Hop culture, the benefits of Hip Hop therapy, and what factors promote resistance in individuals and community, there was a lack of empirical research regarding what roles community-based mental health programs played within Hip Hop and Resistance. In addition, there was little information on the extent of sickness that systems of oppression played among communities and what factors community-based agencies implemented to promote healing, specifically among minority groups. Therefore, there was no sufficient evidence-based research framing mental health programs as forms of Collective Resistance. Despite limited research, decades of community-based scholars support the idea that collective resistance is an integral part of health and wellness, and serves as means of fighting oppression and marginalization (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2014; KRS-One, 1995; Vinthagen, 2013; West, 1994). Although BRL has been providing community based services for eleven years and frames its work as “community-defined practice”, BRL has not engaged in traditional empirical explorations of what makes the BRL program work as a community-based practice. The proposed research utilizes a phenomenological qualitative approach since the experience of Hip

Hop, Oppression, and Resistance are both subjective and shared and aims to provide empirical support to collective resistance theories in the context of social work practice and mental health.

Participants and Procedures

Participants were invited to the study utilizing a community referral method. Interviews began with the founder, the executive director, and the chief operations officer. At the end of the interview, each of these individuals suggested other members of the BRL community to interview including teaching artists, board members, community partners, and former employees. Potential participants were contacted with assistance from BRL and if they expressed an interest, we met for a 2-hour skype or phone interview. When the participants and I met, we first took a couple of minutes in setting up a stable connection, establish rapport, and provide space for clarification. We then proceeded with the interview and reiterated to the participants they freely had the option to stop the interview, not answer, and to ask questions when needed.

Each participant was presented with a 20 question interview (Appendix D) that covered topics on Hip Hop, oppression, resistance and collective resistance, family and community, daily life experiences, and what ways had BRL influenced the participants' understanding one each of those areas. Twelve participants were interviewed from March through May, 2016; however, only six were used for the findings section due to time constraints. The interviewees ranged from teaching artists, clinicians, community members, and leaders of BRL in order to get an all-around sense of the work BRL does with the community; provide an array of perspectives around the subjects of Hip Hop, Oppression and Power, Collective Resistance, and BRL's role; and to see differences and similarities in the narratives of each member.

Data Collection

Because my approach to this qualitative study is through a phenomenological lens, the interview questions were tailored to be consistent, flexible, and written in a way to control my own bias on the subject. The domains of the interview focused on Hip Hop, oppression, family, and resistance. The composition of the interview questions were semi-structured due to the fact several of the questions were open-ended and allowed for the conversation to flow while touching on each domain. Another reason for a semi-structured interview was it allowed for probing and interpretation.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this cross-sectional study, the narratives were analyzed through a conventional approach, also known as inductive category development (Hsieh & Shannon, 2016) in which data was predominantly collected through open-ended questions and interviews with BRL staff & community. Emerging themes in subject areas were also coded regarding findings between the participants and how they were influenced by BRL when it came to understanding Hip Hop, collective resistance, oppression, community, and BRL. The analysis attempted encompass major key points which address the initial question of how does BRL serves as a catalyst for collective resistance by looking at the content transcribed from the interviews, as well as, comparing and contrasting data, and using video footage of the interviews to ensure validity and clarity. Through the process of coding, the findings incorporate four predominant themes which will be addressed in the following chapter: 1) Hip Hop - A Culture of Healing & Justice; 2) Oppression - The Distortion of Power & Privilege; and 3) Collective Resistance - Strength in Numbers.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This qualitative study explored what elements the Oakland, California based agency Beats, Rhymes, & Life, Inc. (BRL) engages in that ignite Collective Resistance among its members, youth, and the outside community by understanding how participants understand and experience (1) Hip Hop, (2) Oppression and Power, and (3) Collective Resistance as well as exploring throughout the role BRL plays within those spaces. Participants ranging from teaching artists, clinicians, community members, and leaders of BRL were interviewed regarding each area of interest. In this chapter, the findings will present narratives from all participants along with their views on Hip Hop, Oppression, Collective Resistance, and the ways BRL influences their understandings on each subject; in addition, the findings will also demonstrate the influences each area has had in their lives as individuals and as members of community. The analysis executed utilized a mix of a Narrative Analysis with a Phenomenological approach. As such, individual stories are presented, but they are clustered around several themes that emerged as participants shared their understanding of the constructs we explored together.

Hip Hop - A Culture of Healing & Justice

*“There was nothin' about it the kid didn't like
So an obsession was born for written rhymes ripping mics
My astute pursuit wasn't about loot to boot I studied the game from root to fruit
People gathered in flocks, Hip-hop, had the block locked
And had us thinking out of the box
The time we were living in it was a testament
For before the corporation would invest in it
And now they acting brand new
I'm waving a flag for the culture, they lookin' at me like I'm a damn fool”
Pep Love, “Hip Hop My Friend”*

The birth of Hip Hop in the 70's took place during a time where gang violence in the Bronx was prevalent, Drug Wars in the U.S. had ignited an epidemic of hustling drugs, economic scarcity was alive, and frustration and weariness was heavy among black and brown communities due to the ongoing perpetuation of marginalization and racism. Nevertheless, a culture was born where graffiti, DJing, breakdancing, and emceeing became artistic expressions against oppression in which the authenticity and connection of heart & mind sparked hope in the hopeless.

Hip Hop gave a voice of opportunity to confront or escape reality, a space to express the authentic self creatively, exploration without fear, vulnerability in private and public, and the chance to tap into emotion and thought. Its roots came as a form of “musical and cultural resistance against the repressive mainstream and state-sanctioned violence against the African-American community. Since then, its message and spirit have reverberated with oppressed people around the globe” (Sommer, 2014). The authenticity in Hip Hop has allowed for individuals to have an alternative outlet in telling their story whether it is through a beat, a rhyme, a piece of art, or a dance – a means to stand up against adversity in justice and healing. This is why Hip Hop is not just a genre of music encapsulated to one group, it is a cross-cultural movement that continues to push the boundaries for justice and change.

In order to understand the role of Hip Hop in collective resistance, this section will outline the findings that cluster around the following themes when attempting to understand how members of BRL view, learn, and experience Hip Hop: (1) Physical location; (2) Transformation & Spaces - a Cycle of Healing; and 3) Exchange, Connection, & Co-Creation.

Physical Location - Hip Hop from the Suburbs to the Streets. When interviewing the participants, every single one had a previous encounter with Hip Hop regardless of physical location or time; however, the physical location provided a different narrative for each participant in their understandings around Hip Hop. When asking James, a leader at BRL, what Hip Hop represented in his life, he shared, “I really didn’t find hip hop until Yo MTV Raps came on TV.” As he grew up, it wasn’t until his location changed from the suburbs to the streets that his knowledge of Hip Hop also grew. “I feel like I really got into it when I moved to [an area that is often considered one of the birthplaces of hip hop].”

James proceeded in sharing how his view of Hip Hop expanded even more through his interaction with individuals where Hip Hop wasn’t just a music genre but a lifestyle. “I was kind of doing community mental health and a lot of our work was doing classical therapy, but in the streets, so instead of having therapy in my office, we’d do it in an alleyway or on the stoop of a brownstone.” James went from being a listener of Hip Hop to a participant and began to discover the roots of Hip Hop culture through the combined powers of youth and lyrical narrative/flow. “I was able to kind of live in as an outsider, kind of like the power of the culture of Hip Hop even more than like the music, right? And so that’s kind of where I started to freestyle in the street with kids and write raps and kind of like, live the life. But the more and more I got into it, the more it spoke to me in terms of social justice and it’s such a natural way to work with youth.” His growing knowledge of Hip Hop and interactions with others provided a scene where James’ experience shifted and consequently shifting his relationship as well, “It was no secret, no surprising me that I just lived the life.”

Different from James’s experience, Ricky- who is one of BRL’s leaders and artists- defined Hip Hop through his experiences in his hometown through the elements of emceeing and

beats, “For me I guess it really starts with expression. My first experience was beat boxing in a cypher and that was when I was a sophomore in high school.” As he grew up, his artistic expressions became more rooted not only through his passion for Hip Hop, but through those around him that shared the same love for the culture. “By the time I was a senior I was actually like right in the middle with the best of the emcees rapping. When I went to college I really was I think that was a peak for me, like a peak not the peak.”

As Ricky went into more depth, it became evident that the deepening of knowledge through Hip Hop’s elements took him to the point of Hip Hop not only as a friend but as a part of self in heart and mind. “It really is steep how hip hop has been embedded in me and what I know to be the origins and why it really started and so it is reflected in my music which I am proud of...it’s like in the way you dress, the way you speak, the way you kind of reflect on things, everything is through that lens and you know, it’s like the skin that I wear. It’s not something that I can take off. It is always a part of me. It’s not even just entertainment at this point. It is more like you know this is how I have to carry myself and this is how I want to be defined in my life.”

Ricky’s narrative of Hip Hop also correlated with Donovan, teaching artist whose sentiment for the culture was not about two parallel roads of self and Hip Hop, but one in the same. “I think for me it’s just who I am, you know what I’m saying? It’s like hip hop for me is where I solidify my identity ‘cuz I chose my stage name, I chose what I wanted to do in terms of ... I wanted to rep the culture. So that’s where a lot of my identity formation came.” Donovan’s statement “where I solidify my identity,” shines a light on how Hip Hop allows the individual to choose and represent within oneself and within community.

Community member Teresa, spoke of her encounter with Hip Hop didn't happen until she moved to the U.S., "I'm not even from this country... and so I think that there was a bit of a disconnect for me in that I didn't feel like hip hop was something that I could claim or be a part of." As Teresa's physical location changed, so did her experience, "so when I eventually connected with hip hop, I think it was primarily from a place of the lyrics and just how it activates me as a woman of color, as a black woman." As Teresa's location changed, so did her experiences with Hip Hop; in this case the message behind the lyrical elements was able to connect and fuel Teresa's power as a black woman. "definitely with hip hop, like J Cole, like people who just have really powerful lyrics around what is to live a marginalized kind of existence, and, also people who highlight the beauty of black, being black, being brown.... I feel like that's something that I really value and appreciate."

Another participant and long-time BRL member Julie, expressed how physical location influenced the switch of listening to mainstream hip hop in the suburbs versus listening to hip hop in the city she moved to. "Honestly I grew up in the suburbs, but I grew up in a time when it was kind of becoming more mainstream, so I definitely couldn't relate and I think, I didn't realize at the time that this was really people's lives, to me it was more entertainment." Alongside physical positioning, social positioning also affects the way a person views, learns, and experiences Hip Hop. Through the process of joining, Julie's perception took a turn. "Then I moved to [the city] and I think I got a different perspective, certainly got to meet all kinds of different people. And I don't know, I guess I wanna say the music made more sense to me then and I got more connected to it up to that point...I think at some point I got a reality check." As Julie moved cities, she engaged with other forms of Hip Hop which deepened her understanding

of the culture; up to the point that what she was listening to was becoming a reality, not just a distant idea.

Teaching artist, Esteban, noted when asked about Hip Hop: “For me it’s just creative expression and it’s just a way of being able to speak to people about the historical significance of- specifically- black people in this country and where we came from and where we’re going.” Hip Hop therefore, opened up a door of time in which those listening can be transcended into the history of a people, the present, or the idea of the future.

The correlations of physical location of the individuals alongside the physical location of Hip Hop sparked an experienced and witnessed transformation, which is where the focus will go next.

Transformation & Spaces - a Cycle of Healing. As I continued interviewing participants around the influences and interactions they had with Hip Hop and BRL, a theme that emerged was transformation cycles influenced by the space BRL represented. As the interview moved from Hip Hop representation to the role BRL played through Hip Hop in their lives, James shared, “It’s gotten deeper. It’s so closely aligned with social work, and I live that life. I feel like [Hip Hop] parallels [social work] in so many ways, it feels attuned to me even though it’s outside of my immediate culture. So I think I’ve been kind of trying to learn what it is to be an advocate and what it is to be a partner and an ally in the process.” The process of James’ transformation took place through an essential piece he touched on, attunement.

Donovan alluded to this piece of human transformation, but through Hip Hop’s cycle of expression and exploration. “All the different sub-genres that come out of just rap, just hip hop music, or even the act of sampling, it’s kind of like, wow- it’s a trip I never thought about it like this. So you think about sampling being a direct tradition into the history and the experience of

being black in America you feel me? ‘Cuz we have Blues, we sampling Gospel, this has been history since we got to America so in that way it's like Hip Hop is self-exploring itself in its experience in America so far.” By Hip Hop self-exploring itself through sampling, it is entering a continual cycle of transformation.

This process of self-exploration and healing is also congruent with James process of self-exploration through Hip Hop in its lyrical form. “Now I make my own songs both at work and outside of work so it’s really even helped me in my own mental health. Now when I have a problem I’ll make a song. No one might ever hear that song, it’s for me. I think I’ve kind of adopted it in both what I do for fun and also to help my understanding of the field. And in a more personal way it helps me heal now. It really helps me take care of myself. It’s more transformative than any other form of music. But of course I’m biased.”

Similarly, Esteban also described this development of self through the growth in his Hip Hop lifestyle and BRL experience. “Before I did BRL, I was rapping anyway and I left to [pursue a different career] because I didn’t feel like rapping was as lucrative as it needed to be. But when I came back, I just feel like BRL is life. It’s one of the terms Beats, Rhymes, and Life. That really is true, it’s life. It’s changed my life just because it’s made me better in every aspect of my life.” Esteban’s transformation was able to go on to a more profound level because he encountered a space where exploration of identity was embraced and his relationship to Hip Hop allowed him to flourish, the experience of Hip Hop- in the context of BRL- did not shackle or devalue him. In addition, through Esteban’s own process, the impact didn’t stay just with him but it spread throughout his relationships, once again tapping into the multiplicity of levels an individual carries. It is safe to say transformation is not dormant, but active waves of change transcending self, heart, mind, community, time, and space. “It’s made me a better teacher, it’s

made me a better student, it's made me a better son for my parents, it's made me a better brother, it's made me a better uncle. It just made me better because I feel like it's almost like a spiritual sense.”

Several of the participants showed a transformation in their thoughts around Hip Hop through their experiences with BRL since it provided a space where therapy and Hip Hop went hand in hand. Donovan shared how viewing Hip Hop through a therapeutic lens at BRL, had transformed his artistry alongside his work with youth. He also expressed how both Hip Hop and therapy are so intertwined, they create a flexibility of where and how both forces can be applied, “I can have a hip hop perspective in an educational setting, I can have a hip hop perspective and psychological perspective in a psychology setting, and then there's also all kinds of different theories [that are about Hip Hop at its core] that go along with you know, being able to sample and just take things.” Ricky’s statement also reinforced an aspect of transformation in the marriage of Hip Hop and therapy “largely because it allows it to be legitimately professional. It allows it to because we have had such success it really makes it so that hip hop is on a professional platform.”

From these voices, one can begin to see how Hip Hop transforms from the outside in and from the inside out through the multiple levels that encompass an individual: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, environmental, and social. Like the social justice Hip Hop ignited through expressions of art and power among people of color, similarly a cycle of transformation is ignited by BRL among not only the participants of this study but within youth of color at the agency. Julie and Teresa both spoke on the healing impact of BRL on youth through one of Hip Hop’s most popular and powerful elements: lyrics and flow - or in other words, rapping. Julie expressed: “It was really cool to see the people making beats [while] we have different topics

that are inspiring to different verses, and then how it all comes together... in the studio and all the different artistic pieces... but also, the emotional connection that a lot of kids and staff had to the issues they were writing about. It paints vivid pictures in a lot of ways, and I think for them, for for a lot of the kids that we worked with, they were more willing to express and share in that format.”

Similarly, Teresa shared the way she witnessed the healing power of Hip Hop at BRL in the lives of youth by pointing out the value of showcases at BRL, and the way there was a platform for the youth to express their truth, “a lot of the kids I worked with they’re battling feeling insignificant and people just don’t pay attention to them, don’t give them attention and so they have this place where they give each other attention, they get to share their stories, they’re building those connections with each other and they’re being listened to.” Through the exchange of stories, building connection, and engaging in opportunities of free self-expression, Hip Hop provided a vehicle for youth to take the steps towards transformation internally and externally.

Exchange, Connection, & Co-Creation. When Hip Hop first came about, it literally began as a co-creation of artistic elements joining with community. One of the pioneers of graffiti, Phase 2, said “I grew up in an atmosphere where we recognized we were being robbed of knowledge of culture and knowledge of self...We created an art form that came up from our supposedly insignificant existences and now it’s everywhere in the world” (Hager, 2014) Phase 2’s use of “we” is a term that was common all across the board in the interviews.

Both Esteban and Ricky shared the story on how BRL first started in which the core of the agency came about through connection. Ricky noted, “We were freestyling on the stairs in a quad one day and you know just going back and forth with beat boxing, I would beat box and he would rap and switch off then **** approached us and it was like ‘man I really like what you

guys are saying. I have a studio can we link up?’ The reason why I really like that story is not just because it shows my background as an artist but that really was how Beats Rhymes and Life was conceptualized.”

BRL came out of connection through the elements of Hip Hop and the sharing of knowledge between these three people imbedded in the ideas of social justice and therapy. Julie also speaks on such powers of connection through working alongside people at BRL. “I mean I think for me one of the coolest things was connecting with some of the interns, some of the kids, some of the other staff who are amazingly talented musically, artistically.” By interacting with members and community, Julie was able to get closer to Hip Hop and experience the culture through the exchange of knowledge both artistically and culturally. “It amazed me how quickly people can express themselves in this format and make something that actually sounds amazing, it sounds awesome, and you kind of feel closer to it, closer to the music when you’re able to go along for the ride for the creation of something in this genre.”

“Going along for the ride” as a form of exchange, connection and co-creation is also mentioned by Donovan. “BRL is the kind of organization that you can’t be a part of and not be affected by so you know, it’s one of those things like as you teach you learn.” The teaching and learning, the co-creation of life & rhymes, and the united transformation within and between youth, clinicians, and Hip Hop artists demonstrate that BRL works in a system outside of the norm. In a space where knowledge is not understood in a top-down formulation, but rather, knowledge is lateral and levels the playing field. Esteban explains by quoting a famous, local artist. “I think E40 said it really cool, like you can learn from a baby. You don’t just have to be a big bucket pouring your information into a little bucket. The little bucket can pour information into the big bucket too.”

Together, these stories illustrate the presence of a *fluid exchange and co-creation of knowledge in an agency that serves youth of color through Hip Hop therapy*. The unity within the exchange of knowledge, narratives, and artistic expression between teachers and learners enhance connection and promote co-creation. Especially within systems in which individualistic nature is praised and disconnection is used as a way to manipulate sense of self, Hip Hop goes against the norm by uniting people in the midst of helplessness - it gives hope in the "systematic brokenness" through connection and building together.

Oppression - The Distortion of Power & Privilege

*“What money got to do with it
When I don't know the full definition of a rap image?
I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it
Institutionalized, I keep runnin' back for a visit
Hol' up, get it back
I said I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it
Institutionalized, I could still kill me a nigga, so what?
If I was the president
I'd pay my mama's rent
Free my homies and them
Bulletproof my Chevy doors
Lay in the White House and get high, Lord
Who ever thought?
Master, take the chains off me!”
Kendrick Lamar, “Institutionalized”*

When participants were asked to give their own definition about what oppression meant for them, major themes that came up were “separation,” “manipulation,” “withholding of resources,” “keeping people sick,” “lack of space,” “dominant systems that don’t make room for people of color,” “disconnection,” and “mainstream.” There was no doubt that every single participant agreed on one thing: oppression is real. James expressed for him oppression meant, “dominant groups will make sure they stay dominant by making sure everybody else is disempowered and fragmented and kind of like devalued. It’s all power and class; class, race,

and gender would be the most impactful.” Julie also touched on the concept of power, “perhaps the withholding of rights, you know, one group by another. It involves certainly a power dynamic;” and Esteban noted, “Oppression is any system that basically comes over like a cloud on a group or an individual.”

Another participant, Donovan, spoke of oppression as, “Oppression is like systematically withholding resources from a group of people; intentionally manipulating people and moving people into a space where like they're just benefited off of...it's making people unhealthy - that's oppression.” If there was a room full of unhealthy people and the cure was intentionally withheld, the sickness would permeate from individual to group and fill up the whole room; therefore, creating a cycle of disease. In oppression, the unique essence of the individual and community deteriorates transcending time and space. “I think oppression is about living is a system that doesn’t make room for you to be you,” Teresa shared. In Spanish there is saying, “mas ciego el que no quiere ver;” which translates to, “more blind is he who does not want to see.” Oppression lives and breathes.

In order to understand the role of oppression in shaping how BRL engages with collective resistance, this section will outline the findings that cluster round the following themes: (1) Cycles of Hurting; (2) Oppression in the Lives of Youth and Lyrics; (3) Community in the Realms of Oppression; and (4) “Fight the Power” Through the Daily Living.

Cycles of Hurting. Both Ricky and James touched on how Hip Hop therapy at BRL works in a system where the ingrained traditional white European models of therapy are rooted in the cycles of oppression. These white dominated cycles then perpetuate the stigmas revolving mental health and marginalized communities. Ricky stated, “you know it is a form of oppression when you are trying to use an antiquated one size fits all Eurocentric model to treat

disenfranchised marginalized often times youth of color who have had experiences that you can never even imagine.” Ricky further explained how applying a one-size fits all model to therapy actually perpetuates the same struggle the therapist and the individual are trying to address. “To think that you know, it’s like my way or the highway approach to healing, is in itself oppressive.” The cycle of hurting then begins to take shape by further internalizing trauma and pain where the fault appears to falls on the individual seeking help. “Then on top of that you want to prescribe medication when [young people] are not showing signs of getting better or [when] you’re failing as a practitioner. That is very oppressive,” Ricky added.

James pointed out how in the clinical world, the therapeutic models taught stem from white, Eurocentric theories which in certain aspects neglect the richness and diversity among those who are often marginalize. “I never understood why all the therapists, the theories that we learn are all from these European white male dudes.” James proceeded in explaining the damaging impact of applying privileged therapeutic models and how it failed youth stuck in the system. “Then we tried to adapt those to working with kids in the B*** and then they wouldn’t show up to therapy and then they would be labeled as resistant for going to therapy. Like it’s their fault. In most cultures you don’t talk to strangers about your problems.” The mold doesn’t work but the minority is the one labeled and dismissed...the oppressor still holds power while the oppressed is still blamed; a factor which Esteban also pointed out, “It’s funny, the same institutions that are supposed to be helping people of color are also the same ones that are oppressing the most, people don’t realize that.”

The ongoing cycle of oppression not only displays itself in the world of mental health, but also takes place in the world of mainstream hip hop music. Ricky touched on this point, “oppression is this notion that we don’t all have the same opportunities. We don’t all have the

same resources. We don't all have the same access to really ignite our ingenuity and our abilities to affect change." He also addressed how oppression in mainstream hip hop replicated cycles of hurt not only outside community, but within community. "The part that really breaks my heart is that it is so ingrained in us, as oppressed people, that we oppress each other. I struggle with this even in terms of mainstream hip hop because it is like I want my brothers and sisters I want them to be financially successful. I want them to get money. But then the message that is portrayed, it is enslaving us. You know it is controlled by again the powers that be, and that is all designed to keep us oppressed. So it is self-inflicted in that way. It breaks my heart."

When interviewing Donovan, he shared his take on how Hip Hop in mainstream perpetuates the cycles of hurting. "Just some of the stuff that's being put in the mainstream music is sickening, literally...I'm not saying that figuratively, I'm saying literally it's sickening you know what I'm saying? Muthafuckas talking about rape on songs you know what I mean, like all the crazy misogyny and disrespect of women ... the violence, the drug use you know?" Donovan then noted how even if the experiences portrayed in the songs are real, they are played in mainstream at much higher levels; therefore, neglecting the healing factors of Hip Hop. "I'm not discounting any of it you know what I mean? I'm just saying people are actually living these type of lives so it's resonating with folks on a certain type of level, might not be the healthiest but I think it's just disproportionate and that's a big problem, a big big problem."

Because BRL works within the realms of mental health, their approach to serving youth of color and communities also goes through the process of walking between two opposing worlds. Ricky touched on the role of BRL among these two opposing worlds. "It is a double-edged sword in terms of stigma. The reason why I say that is because we are trying to reduce the rate of stigma around therapy in young folks seeking therapy. But then on an organizational level

we are trying to reduce the stigma around Hip Hop and people taking this art form seriously and this culture seriously but then as a viable practice in the social work to in the helping professions.” Ricky expressed the irony of providing healing but having to use the tools of those causing the hurt. “We are trying to make therapy cool for young folks and then we are also trying to you know again legitimize Hip Hop therapy for the powers that be and the folks that are like pulling the strings and making it so that you can’t deny it you know?”

Along with Ricky, Esteban touched on the point of the lack of resources for Hip Hop. “Even in when we write our curriculum there’s no hip hop doctrine that’s available that we can pull from. We kind of have to write it ourselves.” He then noted how the only way to legitimize Hip Hop’s benefits was by incorporating the same Eurocentric models of therapy which oppression utilizes in the cycles of hurting, “but there’s a lot of therapeutic models that are already in existence we can pull from and the only way we can get our dollars is by attaching the hip hop model to a therapy model. That’s kind of the catch 22 situation,” Esteban stated.

Donovan touched on the point of how marginalized people are targeted through the ways Hip Hop is used in mainstream and is used in taking away those spaces for youth and community. “different stuff on on the radio you feel me, and like the way we re-live and recycle our trauma you know and like that’s oppression, that’s actually oppression at its finest because is self-inflicting you know what I’m saying.” He further explained how replicating these cycles of hurting are a form of keeping people sick by controlling their resources and distorting their value. “So then it goes back again to like the individual and what the individual is doing to make themselves healthy and break themselves from it. It’s like it’s easier to control unhealthy folks, it’s easier to manipulate somebody who has like a whole bunch of needs and not many options you know what I’m saying and, you feel me it’s like easier to overthrow a people or hold a people

down if they're like nutrition is all fucked up you know what I'm saying...if they're uneducated... you know it's like if you if you take these resources away from people... specifically going back to this rap shit, is sick, is just straight-up sick.”

Oppression in the Lives of Youth and Lyrics. After learning what oppression meant for the participants; I proceeded asking in what ways have their experiences with BRL influenced their understanding of oppression. Esteban expressed, “I think BRL is a response to the oppression that we see in the United States and in the world, specifically when we look at people of color. It’s a response to a symptomatic issue that’s been happening for generations. That’s how I would define oppression.” Like Esteban, Julie also pointed out the way BRL had influenced her perception of oppression through the teachings of Hip Hop, therapy, and stories of youth and staff experiences of injustice. She described her understanding had shifted by being able to see how her position of privilege may have blinded her to the ways oppression caused significant obstacles among youth she was serving. “I just didn’t have the awareness. So, really understanding what it is like the things that are maybe subtler that people go through every day that I wasn’t maybe as tuned into, but really kind of getting to know different kinds of people’s experiences and certain things that I take for granted, or other people take for granted, and how the work is definitely not done.” Through BRL she was able to dispel some of those blind spots in the work and narratives presented by staff and youth of color at the agency.

Along the same lines, James touched on the power of narrative in lyricism as a method for understanding oppression straight from the heart and mind of individuals. “What changed when I got to BRL was the intimacy of the narratives of what oppression looks like on the backend. Hearing it through the lyrics and the conversations we have in group about how oppression can manifest in people; like how it kind of lives inside of me.” James pointed out how

the lyrical elements of Hip Hop incorporated at BRL, challenged and widened his understanding of oppression at a much more personal level; especially through the stories of youth of color and their experiences within the system. “There is something that kind of came out through the lyrics that you would not get through a normal session talking to somebody.”

For Teresa, the lyrical element also provided a window for how youth of color had encountered inequality, injustice, and other oppressive components. Hip Hop therapy at BRL presented a much more active form - or loud voice - of artistic expression denouncing the harm of oppression; Teresa noted through lyrics youth engaged in “the process of creating and recognizing that there was a need.” Like in a family, the youth are the ones who create a sense of hope to not replicate the “mistakes” done by their elders. Like in healing, youth are essential in the work of breaking the cycles of hurt driven by oppression. As I asked Teresa more about oppression, she commented on how oppression “doesn’t make room for you to be you.” It is no surprise then that youth are also heavy targets by systems in play in order for those at the top to stay at the top, and those at the “bottom” to stay at the bottom.

Community among the Realms of Oppression. Next, I was interested in learning how the participants’ understood and reacted to oppression as members of community. There was a range of experiences across the board based on social positioning, physical location, race, and the spaces participants occupied within community. When interviewing Donovan, he shared how where he grew up as well as his social positioning of being a black man, influenced greatly his view and awareness of oppression. “I see it around me all the time every day...every day! I see a little differently than some of my folks but we all pretty much know, pretty much know what's going...we all understand that this, at this point it's just not cool you.” He also pointed out how he witnessed the injustice through his friends’ experiences along with hearing the experiences youth

go through, and how they're similar to the experiences he went through when he was a young kid. "And that's the thing with kids, like kids understand too from a very young age they like know this is not fair you know what I'm saying...one of these things is not like the other so is like we know from a young age, I knew from a young age that it just wasn't cool you know?" In addition, Donovan also spoke of the conversations of oppression and injustice going on at home and witnessing the way his family experienced inequality and racism; he touched on how as he grew up, he noticed more and more how those conversations were actually a reality not just for him, but for his community as well. "I guess I kinda just picked up on it, I kinda just thought about it, saw it to be true, experienced to be true and it was like "oh is not just me this is happening to" you know what I mean?"

On the other hand, Julie's experience of oppression shifted due to social positioning as a white person and physical location where housing is extremely expensive. Her encounters were based more on issues of income, housing, and gentrification. "It's amazing what it's done to this city and the ability to live here as a middle class person...it's impossible, like I can't move, I can't, I won't be able to move because a one-bedroom apartment is four grand."

In contrast to Julie, Esteban's experience of oppression in community focused heavily on race and how that played into his profession. "You have to play the role and wear the mask, you have to wear the veil. That's something else we teach the kids because they always talk about keeping it real. Why can't I just keep it real?" Esteban also touched on how in order to move in the realms of oppression, there has to be intentionality on how to mobilize and act based on racial inequalities in society. "You can't always keep it so real. You have to understand that sometimes you can be assassinating yourself just with what you say and how you say it. It doesn't mean that you can't get your point across, but you definitely have to phrase it in a way to

package it in a way.” The fact people of color have to “package” certain things in order to be heard is oppressive in itself.

Following the experiences of oppression as community members, the interviewees were asked how did they challenge oppression based on their roles within community. The predominant theme was exchanging knowledge through a wide variety of methods including organizing events, hip hop music, conducting trainings, and being willing to learn and listen. Teresa shared about experiences of mobilizing as an undergrad to work with women of color and organizing a trip to a conference about race and privilege. Similarly, Esteban talked about his approach through the power of Hip Hop, “I think that it permeates itself in several different ways. My lyrics for example, I feel like that’s the easiest way for me to really express how I feel to the community and get the community to kind of rally with me;” and James touched on it by looking into it through the intersectionalities in his social positioning as a white male, Hip Hop lover, and mental health practitioner. “I believe it goes back to that sharing of knowledge piece and not just me sharing my knowledge; me learning from their knowledge also. I might have some technical understanding about how oppression kind of works. I hadn’t seen a lot of it, but as a white male I have been very privileged to not have been affected by all of those things. Sometimes I can help with like a language of things that people have been through and then we can go forward with that and they can also help inform my understanding by looking at these personal narratives. So it feeds into each other and then only together and we kind of make change with those things.”

Ricky highlighted the importance of knowledge in discussing the role of the BRL community and dispelling the stigmas of oppression. “I think that is the power of what we’ve done with Beats Rhymes and Life in terms of our youth centered approach because we really do

look at youth as the assets and the thought leaders and the experts.” By tapping into the power of youth, Ricky highlighted the way BRL “empower them to be in the roles where they can really change people’s perceptions of what youth are and what they can accomplish.”

As I listened to each participant, white supremacy and systemic oppression showed up by breaking human connection and blocking the flow of education; thus, allowing the misuse of power and privilege to hold the reigns in the enslavement of the minds.

“Fight the Power” through the Daily Living. As the participants and I moved through the interview, the last piece on oppression which I was interested in was how did each individual respond to oppression in their daily lives. The answers encompassed using the jewels of social justice in Hip Hop; the power of artistic expression; being strategic about how to use the spaces we encounter; the strength in connection; intentionality behind voice; and how the response varies depending on who has our back.

James shared one of the ways he responded to oppression was by his passion for serving others through Hip Hop, and adopting the mentality that oppression wasn’t just an idea, but an actual reality which keeps re-traumatizing those marginalized. “I kind of feel like we are at war. I kind of feel like I am not going to work every day, I’m going to a mission and it is because of oppression, is because of the trauma and because of all the shit that we have to deal with every day. We have to find a way to make even a little dent in that. Because hip hop is so powerful and it can be such a conduit for discussions, it’s very empowering actually to be able to go to work knowing that from something bigger we are helping people with a bigger thing.” Challenging oppression doesn’t have to be big acts of change, they can be in the small actions of the daily living. Little by little the impact is made and the collective voices will be heard.

Along the lines of Hip Hop and artistic expression against oppression, Donovan noted he used lyrics as a vulnerable process of naming the powers at play, “my music is the way I address it...I process in it.” He pointed out how lyrics enact a process of self-exploration and community by increasing his understanding of self as a black man. “You're really thinking about like what you're saying or like how you wanted to come out you know so like me being present at that in my own writing has made me a better writer therefore made me a more, I don't know thoroughly explored person.” Donovan not only spoke of the restorative aspect in lyricism within himself, but within his work at BRL and igniting that process with youth, “getting other people to have that conversation with themselves; or you know call out some things or very simply just like being an example of not what is in some of these young folks neighborhood and not what they've seen.”

For Teresa her response was focused on how responding to oppression had to be strategic and, varied based on her social environment and physical location, “I would love to say like every time I see something that seems oppressive that I stand up against it but like, I know I don't, it depends on where I'm at, who else is there; and the consequences I guess you know?” Donovan also touches on the intentionality and positionality, “I pick and choose, honestly I pick and choose a lot because otherwise I'll just be an angry black man like all day, all the time.”

As I continued interviewing Teresa, she also emphasized in the importance of who has one's back when acting against oppression. “Of standing up so, in terms of seeing who's there again I think it's that piece of finding somebody else who's got your back, sometimes that doesn't happen and maybe you still have to stand up.” Because “standing up” calls for risk-taking, Teresa's' response touched on the point of being strategic and intentional - pretty much

pick your battles. She compared her experience of participating in a protest at a city where she knows people and is more open to social action, versus not attending a Black Lives Matter protest in a city where white conservative ideals are more ingrained and she didn't know anybody. Therefore, Teresa's statement sheds light on how responding to oppression is influenced by connecting with people and who is there to provide support.

For Julie and Ricky, some of the forms they respond to oppression is to use the oppression they experience themselves as a tool of self-awareness and a tool to guide others in empowering themselves. "I think the oppression I mainly experience is the oppression that women face certainly." Julie is intentional about the way she uses her voice, experiences, and witnessing of oppression as a tool "to help them empower themselves." Her experience of being a woman and joining with others served as a means to step up against oppression, "so you're kind of blind to it in a way because, you don't know anything else until, until something helps your vision become more clear."

Ricky's use of voice and connection with others was also used as a response to oppression regarding racism. "I to see people's reaction to me it is motivating and at the same time it is really disheartening because I am so in touch with my humanity and because I am so in touch with this notion of wanting to be connected to even if we have many differences. It doesn't mean I have to like you all the time but I don't want to let those differences create divisiveness and a wedge between us." He then proceeded in sharing how he strategically uses racial stereotypes in dismantling racism: "I think you know the way I respond to oppression in my own life is looking forward to the opportunity to dispel it and really going out of my way to like you know break down those same barriers and those same walls that are put up even when I don't know you and I just have an interaction with you on the street and you cross the street or

you get to me or you look at me a certain way.” Once again the themes of joining, intentionality behind voice, and the strength in connecting with others humanity is displayed as powerful forces fighting oppressive mentalities and modalities.

As for Esteban, another form of responding to oppression with intentionality of voice and being strategic regarding the spaces encountered, is keeping the end goal in mind and not getting side tracked through the very system of oppression individuals mobilize in. “I have to work ten times harder just to get a justice with what it is that these kids need. I feel like I’m a healer. That’s what I was put on this earth to do. Like I’m here to heal people, specifically kids. It’s like if you’re a healer you’ve got to understand you’re going to have mud thrown on you often.” Oppression devalues the person, the profession, the experience, and makes people lose focus of the journey. Through the experiences shared by the participants, their responses opened a door and set out the path in identifying what ways to unload the heavy baggage of oppression. Replace the items inside with those that are soul healing, instead of soul chipping - which is where we will go next through Collective Resistance.

Collective Resistance - Strength in Numbers

*“The elevation of today's generation
If could make 'em listen
Prison ain't what we need, no longer stuck in greed
Time to play and strategize, my family's gotta eat
When we make somethin out of nothing
No pleasure in the suffering, neighborhood would be good
If they could cut out all the busting
The liquor and the weed the cussing
Sending love out to my block
The struggle never stops (unconditional love)
In this game the lesson's in your eyes to see
Though things change, the future's still inside of me
We must remember that tomorrow comes after the dark
So you will always be in my heart, with unconditional love”
Tupac, “Unconditional Love”*

The participants and I not only had an exchange on how they viewed oppression, but we also engaged in dialogue on how they understood resistance, specifically collective resistance. Across the board one factor that became clear was resistance as a “form against the norm;” and collective resistance as “strength in numbers.” Before understanding Collective Resistance and introduce some of its components, it is important to understand what *resistance* entails, which is where the interviewees and I began.

Resistance - Human Expression Against Oppression. When interviewing the participants if they could give me a brief definition of what resistance meant to them, they defined resistance as *standing against the norm*. When interviewing Teresa explained it as, “standing up against something that is oppressive, something that just doesn’t feel right and standing up doesn’t necessarily have to be physical, it could be speaking out against something.” Similarly to Teresa, Julie noted on resistance as taking action based on that unsettling gut feeling of “wrongness” in an atmosphere that is telling you otherwise, “refusal to accept the status quo in whatever way and in some way taking action whether that’s very active, if its passive resistance - which is not I guess accepting something that doesn't feel right because it is the way things are done.”

When asking the same question about what resistance meant to James, he noted, “It is an energy movement. Strategic movement. Resistance coming from a deep kind of like hidden place in you but also seeing resistance coming from a very thought out response to social oppression. So it can be a very in your soul place but also come from like a heavy place.” He pointed out resistance was possible when it was intentional and strategic internally and externally. “Like it comes from a very intentful place and it can come from your drive. It just comes from your soul recognizing something is wrong on a human level and just like we resist against, we don’t even

know that we're resisting. So I think the kind of, the dormant underpinnings, like the hid part of it is there and kind of the more structural piece is also there."

For Esteban the way he viewed resistance was as a force pushing against the status quo in which "anything that is considered a standard is completely shifted." He used the example of women of color and hair: "I've seen on the news recently a lot of young black girls have been told that they can't wear their hair certain ways being in the Academy because it's not presentable and it's not tamed. Even in the military you can't wear cornrows. You have to actually have your hair permed and combed. I feel that these are all responses to the resistance that we feel, that people of color feel, that marginalized people feel for not having the same privileges that are afforded for the American dream."

Donovan touched on the power of authenticity and how being yourself and knowing yourself leads to resistance. "Me having my hood on or having my hood off doesn't make any difference how I am representing myself in this space and if you can't handle that then you got a problem with it then, like then you need to check what your associations with the way that I dress is you know?" He also pointed out resistance was ignited in the act of knowing ourselves through the lens of Hip Hop, "Hip Hop has to know itself to maintain in these spaces and if you don't, somebody's going to come along with a different experience and a different objective from you, and they're going to assimilate totally into the space, they're going to switch it." Without awareness of self and others, there is a higher chance of falling vulnerable to the cycles of hurt or perpetuate those cycles ourselves. "I feel like resistance is taking care of yourself, I feel like again being in a place where you know as much as possible you feel me you can, you can be present so you don't fall for the okie-doke."

By “maintaining” authenticity along with an ongoing growth of consciousness, the individual can then move in structured spaces and decide both when to take action and when to self-protect. In addition, this “awakeness” of self and others provides a shield to not be fooled by oppressive systems in play, or fall into the lies of misjudged labels, manipulated fantasies, and the selling of self to the “highest bidder”. Esteban also used Hip Hop as an example of resistance which in the wrong hands can turn into systemic oppression; he noted, “it’s a lifestyle that shows that were not going to stand for oppression and privilege that we may not have. It’s just basically what 30 years of Hip Hop is making something out of nothing and making it fashionable. The problem I have is that so many people are profiting off of it now it is becoming a cultural appropriation of sorts to make big business.”

Following the parallel roads of self and Hip Hop in understanding resistance, Ricky and Donovan supported Esteban’s statement of Hip Hop as a form resistance as well. Donovan described it as, “I think in terms of Hip Hop - resistance is just continuing to shit...to be alive out here man you know what I'm saying; I think it's just straight up living and I think that the ability to be able to dance, or create art, or manipulate music...interact with the large group of people like being in community is a big form of resistance.”

Donovan’s concept also correlated with Ricky’s answer, “From the inception Hip Hop was the greatest form of resistance. Hip hop was the social justice movement during that time period. I really feel like because of that since its inception that that’s what it’s been about. It’s been a resistance to things that are counterintuitive or detrimental to humanity. So it is just natural to already be the platform of resistance and then it really depends on the individual of how you want to stand on it or do you stand on it collectively and know that your power is really significant when you resist together.”

In addition, both Donovan and Ricky mentioned the notion of resistance being at its strongest through the power of community, collectivity, group; “I feel like it takes a lot of forms but it is most important and most influential and most successful when it is collective,” Ricky expressed. Donovan further extended on this point through his lens of being a black man among societal structures, “Again I’m coming from the black perspective, so much of us being here in this country has been about like kind of separating so you don’t know who you can trust, so it’s easier to control, easier to manipulate, and you get together with a group of people. Think about if you go to a Stevie Wonder concert and then a song comes on and a thousand people stand up in agreeance, you know what I’m saying, how often do you have a thousand people agreeing on something you feeling me like at the same time.”

Unity provides the strongest form of expression of resistance in which love for ourselves, for others, for nature propels the essence of human connection to catalyze actions of *standing up against the status quo* of oppression. Therefore, it is imperative and necessary to not only understand what collective resistance is, but in what ways it is represented and how can it be applied to our present day - which is where the participants and I went to next.

Collective Resistance - Togetherness, Co-Creation & Education in the Name of Justice. Now that there is a clearer understanding on what resistance entails, we will review the main components of collective resistance, which are divided into three sub-categories which revolve around togetherness, education and space, and the power of action in the daily living.

Together We Are Better. After talking with each interviewee about resistance, we proceed in addressing how they would define *collective resistance*. Themes of “togetherness,” “community,” “sharing of knowledge,” “standing up as team,” and the like were common across the board. Julie, for example, stated “People coming together rather than the idea that an

individual could do that.” Julie not only spoke of the togetherness but for the together to take action towards a common goal and believe. Similarly, Teresa also spoke of the piece of taking action in the form of standing up not as an individual, but as a unit; “I imagine collective resistance getting together with other people who share your values, share your definition you know of what’s oppressive or what’s not right and standing up together to that thing and trying to make that thing change right?” Teresa noted an important point of how in collective resistance there has to be an agreement in the group of identifying what the oppression is in order for there to be movement. In addition, Teresa pointed out, “I think it’s probably more difficult to do, to actually make an impact and to change something on your own, versus doing it collectively.”

Teresa’s explanation correlated with James’ view on the importance of collectivity when engaging in change versus individuality, “It’s better if we can fight it collectively because they are coming at us as a team and we need to fight it back as a team. Not try to deal with it in individual...” James spoke of collective resistance as once again people coming together in united thought and moving in that togetherness. He also expressed how the collectivity was necessary due to “it it takes a radical group of negative influences working together to impact us in a bad way;” therefore, because the force against resistance is collective, the resistance needs that level of collectivity or else it would be like going into battle without a shield or friend.

When asking Donovan about his interpretation on collective resistance, he provided once again the example of the unity one would find in a Stevie Wonder concert, an array of individuals coming together under a joined purpose and agreement. However, Donovan pointed out collective resistance has more than one side, more than one story; “I think part of my reservation with resistance comes from is is so reactive, you know what I mean and I want, I

think that that's one side of the coin; it's also important to be proactive, that's another form of resistance.”

Ricky and Esteban both talked about the power of community and alignment within community that gives collective resistance a certain “kick” to stand out of the norm; “It’s takes a village to raise a child like...many hands make light work. I think it really is being on the same vibration and having the cognitive alignment, having the strategic alignment, having the physical alignment, having the emotional alignment, and having the spiritual alignment,” Ricky shared. When asking Esteban on his take on collective resistance, he stated, “is just basically communal resistance based upon the same themes and the same morals, the same principles, the same guidelines.”

Esteban touched on the breaking of community by the ways oppression dominating the vehicles that promote unity; for example, once again Hip Hop culture versus hip hop in mainstream. “I feel like now the resistance in terms of hip-hop is basically skewed. Have too many people collectively standing for anything resistant. You see all the black lives matter. You see the whole situation with the police killing young people of color, but how many people do you have even talking about it and rap lyrics? Nobody. That to me shows a lot about how the industry dominates these rappers. If you are going to make it into this industry you cannot talk about political things that are going to upset the established order. The funny thing is that the majority of people who buy hip-hop are white suburbia and kids.”

Esteban’s view joined with Ricky’s perspective of Hip Hop as a tool for collective resistance and the power it is rooted in, but somehow when entering the realms of oppression and money fantasies Hip Hop loses its united narrative...loses the control: “I think it is funny because it is like hip-hop is a perfect vehicle and tool to do that. Right now we are not even in control of

it. I mean it's still in our hearts. It still defines our swag if you will. We don't control hip-hop. Therefore, we don't control the number one vessel or vehicle to build collective resistance."

Through the elements of togetherness, reactivity and proactivity, unity, alignment, teamwork, and community, collective resistance is ignited in order to pursue collective liberation.

Co-Creation in Education & Platforms of Knowledge. As the interviews continued, I was interested in learning how the agency BRL (Beats, Rhymes, and Life, Inc.) shaped the participants' understanding on collective resistance.

Donovan shared how his experience at BRL focused on igniting healing and happiness in the co-creation with Hip Hop, "if the individual is healthy or healthier than the community, the collective will be healthier." Esteban's statement went along the same lines, "collective resistance basically stems from the communities need for healing." He proceeded in explaining how the need for community healing is imperative in order to break the perpetuation of oppression within them, and then shared his experience as a black man; "I was looked at like you talk white or you had both your parents or you live up there in the hills so you must think you're better than us. You could just see the hate and the feeling permeating itself from my community and that just made me so sad because I'm like no, I want you all to be happy too." Like Donovan and Esteban noted when the collective resistance is against self, that's when the individual falls for the lies oppressive systems impose; "that's something else that has been a collective resistance for me is the self-hatred, the self-loathing. When you see someone successful in your community it's saying I don't want them to be successful."

The sentiment and action of sharing in collective education as form of collective resistance, was a factor Julie expressed as well with the way BRL influenced her concept of

collective resistance. The piece she emphasized on though, was how BRL reflected exchange of knowledge through the lyrical power embedded in Hip Hop; “it’s collective in that the community may listen to a song or a piece of art that has a message about some kind of resistance, or even you know, different artists coming on the same track and speaking their various views about a certain issue; in our case that would be some of our kids, some of our staff you know, together on a track.”

For James, the ideas of sharing and platforms were also touched on in his conceptualization of collective resistance and BRL’s role. He shared through BRL, they’ve been able to build spaces for dialogue in both micro and macro levels through the pairing of therapy and Hip Hop, “as small as getting people together to talk about common topics that are impacting their community level; like we make songs about events that happened in Oakland. We’ve made ones that sound like macro things like violence, and really providing the atmosphere where our community members can talk about those things but then digest it through music. And then more importantly getting that back out to the public.”

Along the same lines, Ricky also spoke of the ways BRL has influenced his understanding on collective resistance, “a cohort of peer mentors transitional age youth. Transitional age youth who are teaching artists with clinicians and so the very definition of collective is just even in our teams that we do in the programs.” Ricky expanded on the concept of teaching by pinpointing the importance of knowledge exchange through a peer to peer approach. “We are training them on the skills that you are actually getting right now in school and all your counterparts are getting and then, if we can actually create the pipeline into those schools, so that we can even level the playing field in that way then there is gonna be several individuals like yourself that are coming from this same mind frame.”

James and Teresa spoke on the vulnerability of youth and how when they enter social services systems, their identity is labeled and put under stigmatizing “blanket” identities. Teresa expressed, “its different degrees but I think for youth, specifically black and brown youth, I think they're definitely perceived a certain way and because they've had such difficult experiences, their behaviors match that and so I feel like a lot of people make assumptions about who they are based off of the way that they express their pain, the way they express the conflict and agony of what they've been through.” She continued stating the significance of the space provided by BRL, “they have a platform to actually put that out and say like, “this is messed up, this is what's happening to me” and I get to share this with you all and also like “you see a different side of me because now here I am performing” you know?”

James’ ideas on collective resistance and BRL correlated with the power of group formation interrupting isolation; he noted, “all the youth that were in foster care were able to really speak on their stories because all of them kind of felt like they were the only ones going through that; like they are the only ones being moved around a lot. They knew there were other foster care kids, but they never really had met another one. They felt like they were all alone in this crazy world they live in.” Ricky also touched on this, “I can shape my identity based on my experiences instead of like based on what people tell me they should be. That is a form of resistance.”

It seemed for all the participants, the entity of BRL was collective resistance in itself in the realms of “one-size fits all” popular type of approach among the field of social services.

Collective Action & Justice in the Daily Living: “We Gon’ Be Alright.”

*“Alls my life I has to fight, nigga
Alls my life I...
Hard times like, "God!"
Bad trips like, "Yea!"*

*Nazareth, I'm fucked up
Homie you fucked up
But if God got us
Then we gon' be alright!*" - Kendrick Lamar, "Alright"

After the participants and I covered forms, characteristics, and understandings of collective resistance; I was curious in what ways they had witnessed or practiced collective resistance in their daily lives.

Teresa and Ricky spoke of witnessing and practicing collective resistance through collective movement. Teresa shared, "for me is just being part of the Black Lives Matter movement and protesting like, being out physically protesting, police brutality and, like physically but also posting things on Facebook, walking out of classes, things like that." I followed up with her by asking how has standing up against forces such as police brutality, impacted different layers of her life. Teresa expressed, "I'm actually realizing how much being a student facilitates that process because I feel like I'm a little bit concerned about going back to the working world, and having job, and like supporting myself with that job and then trying to figure out how would I walk out." In addition, Teresa pointed out the power of youth within collective resistance and their identities as students, "just makes me so appreciative of all the youth in Ferguson who like rose up."

For Ricky on the other hand, shared his experience with being part of Black Lives Matter and how it was birthed through what happened with Oscar Grant, "the way the city stood up and used the power of the voice and the power of protest to really speak to those ills. It was amazing to be a part of that." Ricky proceeded in discussing his own shifting roles within the realms of collective resistance; as he continues to grow so does his roles continue evolving, "I have to be the leader and example of what a Hip Hop therapist or social worker or teaching artist should be because there is not too many out there." He spoke of transitioning from being an undergrad in

school protesting, to being part of the professional world and causing reformation from within the system, “so let’s be more strategic about how we are using that power,” Ricky stated.

Julie’s experience with collective resistance was influenced by physical location and shifting of spaces, “Living in the *** you witness it all the time! I mean it’s a politically active area...it must’ve been when the Ferguson riots were going on.” As Julie’s spaces changed, so did her interactions, knowledge, and involvement of collective resistance. Julie used her social positioning to advocate in larger entities where the youth are not easily heard, “when it happened to me a staff, maybe they were willing to listen a little bit more because you’re hiring people to do this job and now, you know, ok this is an epidemic we can’t really ignore.” An interesting factor Julie touched on was how her individual experience actually allowed her to join with other youth at a level that would not have been possible before. “It was like such a shift in my world because like I said, to me this wasn’t a reality; everyone else that was around was fairly nonchalant because they said, “hey you know we deal with this everyday...everyday” and for me that blew my mind.”

Picking up on the force of collective voice, one of James’s experiences with collective resistance was at school collecting feedback of student experiences and how the committee could make it better, “we really wanted to get everyone’s feedback and able to take it back to the school and say here is collectively what the students at *** are saying about the curriculum, what they want to change about the curriculum.” James witnessed collective resistance was through BRL’s programs where youth are taught the tools of therapy and Hip Hop by integrating both in concept and practice; “collective resistance works it kind of lives in BRL is like in the Academy. We teach clinical theory to the Academy along with artist skills, but in a way that they understand. So we will look at an old Freudian therapy, but we will translate it to what would it

be spoken like in Hip Hop language.” He further explained the importance of Hip Hop therapy in collective resistance, “I feel like therapy is too powerful and too important to be like in the hands of only experts. It really should be for the people. So we’re trying to train the Academy program like in therapy, but then saying how can we can critique this under a cultural lens and together how can we use this to kind of combat the trauma in our society.”

Different from James’s experience, Esteban provided a narrative in which he experienced collective resistance in both negative and positive ways, “there’s been a collective resistance with them multiple times because a lot of them don’t feel like the timing we’re given, the tools that we’re given, the resources that we’re given are sufficient to see those things to fruition.” One of the ways he worked with this issue was “I’ve learned that in order to resist back I have to be able to see what kind of leader they need me to be in that moment.” Esteban then touched on how to address a situation when there’s a collective rupture. “It all comes down to the root things that bind us together. That’s what always brings the conversation back to a good place. So why are we here? What is the purpose of being here? We’re all here to make sure the kids learn. We’re all here to make sure the kids grow. People just want respect. People want to feel like they have an empathetic ear.”

When interviewing Donovan, he spoke both on witnessing and experiencing collective resistance through the Occupy Movement, “it was a trip to watch that cuz that’s how the conversation started. I left, I came back a couple of hours and it moved forward to where people were voting you know what I mean, and actually making a collective decision to march; it ended up being a crazy amount of people like thousand people.” For Donovan, the determination and intentionality for justice in togetherness gave him hope, “having a little bit more faith in

humanity you know what I'm saying; you know like okay wow we can really, if we really want to we can really lock it down and move forward.”

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways which the Oakland, California based agency Beats, Rhymes, & Life, Inc. (BRL), understood as a community-based intervention program, serves as a catalyst for Collective Resistance from the perspectives of staff (both clinicians and artists), community members, and program supporters. The study utilized a mix of both narrative and phenomenological approaches throughout. In total, twelve participants were interviewed, however, only six participants were included for the purpose of this research. Each participant was interviewed regarding their views on Hip Hop, Oppression and Power, Collective Resistance, and the role BRL played in each one of the mentioned categories.

Because the study focuses on Collective Resistance, writing the paper itself was a participation in the movement of resistance against the norm. By engaging in code-switching between an academic voice and the voice of my roots in the communities which I belong to - such as Hip Hop culture, Colombiana/Latina immigrant, and social justice participant - it was my small way to “fight the power.” The central themes around Hip Hop, Oppression and Power, Collective Resistance, and BRL were distilled throughout the study; they are also reviewed briefly below and discussed. The limits of the current analysis will be outlined at the end of the discussion and recommendations for next steps will be included.

Major Findings.

*“If you looked at my life
And see what I see” - Mary J. Blige, “My Life”*

Hip Hop - a Culture of Healing & Justice. At first the participants were asked about Hip Hop in order to understand Hip Hop’s role in the movement of Collective Resistance. The

interview covered topics of what Hip Hop represented in the participants' lives; how it had impacted them; and the role of BRL in their understandings of Hip Hop. Several major themes emerged such as the influence of 1) physical location; 2) Hip Hop as cycle of healing; and the 3) exchange, connection, and co-creation within the culture.

Physical Location - Hip Hop from the Suburbs to the Streets. When interviewing the participants, every single one had a previous encounter with Hip Hop regardless of physical location or time; however, the physical location provided a different narrative for each participant in their understandings around Hip Hop. Furthermore, as physical location changed, perceptions of Hip Hop either changed or were reinforced; Hip Hop as music and Hip Hop as fluid cultural movement became two intersecting roads.

For some as they became more and more involved in Hip Hop culture through the shifts of physical location, they went through transformative processes of thought and feeling at individual and communal levels in which Hip Hop wasn't just a musical genre, but an artistic expression, a movement of social justice, a source of healing, and a lifestyle. Another key factor which arose was the intersectionality between physical location and social positioning; for example, for some participants their social positioning as a person of color interacted differently with some lyrical elements of Hip Hop and where they found themselves physically. It was interesting to notice intersections happening within self and environment which demonstrates the multiplicity of layers of humans; regardless of how different we are, in some shape or form one of those layers will connect with someone else's in the realms of Hip Hop and culture.

When the participants joined with a person and an environment, there was a certain level of comfort that was challenged due to the fact the individual had to step into the unfamiliar. What was found was when entering discomfort, an opportunity for learning, sharing, and

embracing was presented which can potentially enhance the quality of the relationship in the midst of vulnerability. Hip Hop therefore, opened up a door of vulnerability and time in which those listening could be transcended into the history of a people, see a reflection of where they are in the present, or have a better grasp of their physical location.

Another piece that came through the interviews was the ways physical location influenced co-creation of Hip Hop and knowledge. For some participants, co-creation taking place in Hip Hop expressions go alongside the individual's experience of co-creation between community, elders, and youth. By learning from others and sharing the collective space, expressions, and significance of Hip Hop, the experience of the individual shifts. The more in depth the individuals went with Hip Hop culture, it became evident that the deepening of knowledge through Hip Hop's elements took them to the point of Hip Hop not only as a friend but as a part of self in heart and mind. The solidification of identity then shines a light on how Hip Hop allows the individual to choose and represent within oneself and within community. This reinforces the idea of Hip Hop as means to go against the grain among dynamics of power and privilege where control is held by breaking one's sense of self; for example, wrongfully labeling black men as dangerous. From stage name, to lyrics, beats, and lifestyle, the shifting yet rooted forms of Hip Hop seem to open a door for authenticity based on the platform it stands on and how we interact with it.

Throughout the narratives of the interviewees, the experiences revolved around the participants joining with Hip Hop - a culture whose roots are imbedded in social justice for those marginalized where authenticity and artistic expression against oppression provides freedom in unity. As Hip Hop's identity shifts to spaces where its authenticity is controlled in corporate realms and radio sound waves, so it seemed for the individual's perception of the culture to be

manipulated. Across the board, all participants expressed a *shift* of the Hip Hop narrative along with a *shift* in their narratives of self externally and internally. Hip Hop is without a doubt unapologetically activating and shifting regarding the spaces it encounters, yet its core of mind and heart transformation remains the same whether in the suburbs, the city, interpersonal spaces, socio-political spaces, or somewhere in between.

Transformation & Spaces - a Cycle of Healing. As the interview moved from Hip Hop representation in the participants' lives to the role BRL played through Hip Hop, a theme that emerged was transformation cycles influenced by the space BRL represented. Across the board, a key element in the process of transformation cycles was attunement. In social work, it is said that the social worker is the instrument; therefore, it is imperative for the social worker to be in a constant process of self-awareness and *attunement* with those being served as well as the spaces encountered. In order to transform, it is a necessity to step into the vulnerabilities of transformation for cycles of healing to ignite. This was true for each participant through their experiences with Hip Hop and BRL.

Another factor that came up was the connection between human transformation linked to Hip Hop's transformation through self-exploration within its artistic expressions. By Hip Hop self-exploring itself in the elements of sampling and lyricism, it enters a continual cycle of transformation; for example, through the culture, social activism, and arts, Hip Hop engages with its history, allows for knowledge of the past to serve as guidance for the present, and inspires innovation. Hip Hop has to be attuned to itself in order to explore itself, which ignites growth. In terms of Hip Hop's element of lyrical expression, it was evident throughout the narratives the healing force writing and listening to lyrics represented for the participants; as well as, the healing they witnessed taking place at BRL in the lives of youth of color.

The transformation within the cycles of healing was more profound because the individuals were able to encounter a space where exploration of identity was embraced. The experience of Hip Hop among youth, staff, and community in the context of BRL, was not one of manipulation, control, or devalue of authenticity. From these voices, one can begin to see how Hip Hop transforms from the outside in and from the inside out through the multiple levels that encompass individual and community: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, environmental, and social. Like the social justice Hip Hop ignited through expressions of art and power among people of color, similarly a cycle of transformation is ignited by BRL among not only the participants of this study but within youth of color at the agency.

Through the power of justice, beat, pen and paper, lyrics and flow push for courage because it calls the individual to enter the daunting yet freeing realms of vulnerability with themselves and with a group of people. These creative expressions of narratives require naming, naming requires honesty, honesty calls for discomfort, discomfort sparks growth, and growth attunes our thoughts and emotions. Each piece combines to form a powerful cycle of transformation in which we can claim and reclaim our identities. When this “formula” transcends to community, an exchange of knowledge and stories produce a space for human connection. The fact that we live in a society in which people of color, are targeted and labeled regularly in a way that devalues one’s identity as having a problem instead of a promise; then the platform BRL provides through Hip Hop’s artistic expression and social activism, represents a powerful force of healing and liberation within authenticity. With authenticity, there is power.

Exchange, Connection, & Co-Creation. From the co-creation in the beginnings of BRL to the connection and exchange of knowledge between youth, staff, and community, it became evident that the spoken language was “unity” among all the interviewees. Some members of

BRL spoke about the beginnings of the agency, which came out of connection through the elements of Hip Hop and the sharing of knowledge embedded in the ideas of social justice and therapy. Other participants spoke on the powers of connection but through the work between youth, staff, and community, which also drew them closer to Hip Hop as a cultural experience.

Several pointed out BRL as an agency in which one can't help but be affected by. The teaching and learning, the co-creation of life & rhymes, and the united transformation within and between youth, clinicians, and Hip Hop artists demonstrate that BRL works in a system outside of the norm. It was evident across the board that the agency in the movement of Hip Hop provides a space where knowledge is not understood in a top-down formulation, but rather, knowledge is lateral and levels the playing field. Everybody is in a collective process of learners and teachers. One participant explained it as: "I think E40 said it really cool, like you can learn from a baby. You don't just have to be a big bucket pouring your information into a little bucket. The little bucket can pour information into the big bucket too."

Together, the stories of the interviewees illustrated the presence of a *fluid exchange and co-creation of knowledge in an agency that serves youth of color through Hip Hop therapy*. The unity within the exchange of knowledge, narratives, and artistic expression between teachers and learners enhance connection and promote co-creation. Especially within systems in which individualistic nature is praised and disconnection is used as a way to manipulate sense of self; Hip Hop is an active movement which goes against the norm by uniting people in the midst of helplessness - it gives hope in the "systematic brokenness" through connection and building together.

Oppression - The Distortion of Power & Privilege. Next participants were asked about power and oppression in order to understand the role these two forces influence the movement of collective resistance. Major themes which emerged were 1) oppression as cycles of hurt; 2) the impact of oppression in youth and lyrics; 3) the role of community in dynamics of oppression and power; and 4) fighting the misuse of oppression and power in the daily living.

Cycles of Hurting. When participants were asked to give their own definition about what oppression meant for them, what came up was “separation,” “manipulation,” “withholding of resources,” “keeping people sick,” “lack of space,” “dominant systems that don’t make room for people of color,” “disconnection,” and “mainstream.” There was no doubt that every single participant agreed on one thing: oppression is real. Power - and the misuse of power by one group over another – appears to be one of the characteristics which births oppression. Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Alex Nieto (and these are only naming a few) are all people of color whose deaths were sparked by cycles of misused power across generations in a society where systemic racism is still alive. Brutality may not come in blatant packages of slavery, but brutality comes in the “subtle” packages of inequality of opportunity where those calling in power want to benefit off of you instead of supporting you. That is oppression: the marriage of power and privilege in the hands of the unchecked.

Many of the participants described oppression and misuse of power in the mental health field as a “one size fits all”, white Eurocentric model used to treat disenfranchised, marginalized minorities. In these singular models, the failures of the one of holding power is avoided by placing the blame on the “client/patient;” therefore, furthering the internalization of trauma and pain. When individuals are confronted with a “one-size fits all model” the vein of authenticity

begins to be cutoff. When authenticity is broken, cycles of hurt perpetuated by disfranchisement take place, and those at the top with unchecked privilege continue holding the reigns of power.

Because BRL works within the realms of mental health, their approach to serving youth of color and communities also goes through the process of walking between two opposing worlds. One of those worlds is mobilizing in systems of oppression in order to legitimize Hip Hop as a therapeutic. The other is interrupting those cycles of hurt by introducing healing through Hip Hop therapy - as one of the artist's put it, "a catch 22". The only way to legitimize Hip Hop's benefits was by incorporating the same Eurocentric models of therapy which oppression utilizes in the cycles of hurting.

The ongoing cycle of oppression not only displays itself in the world of mental health, but also takes place in the world of Hip Hop within the misused form of mainstream hip hop music. The way certain therapeutic models are double-edged swords in their means to heal but end up hurting those who are oppressed structurally, mirrors the way Hip Hop is a double-edged sword as well. The one size model used to serve others, imposed by those calling shots, is the one size model mainstream hip hop imposes through those calling the shots of what type of hip hop is played for the public majority. Not only that, but the fact the consumers of mainstream have appropriated pieces of the culture by purchasing what hurts the community is another form of cycles of hurting. In addition, people of color continue to be marginalized through the ways Hip Hop is used in mainstream and is used in taking away those spaces for youth and community; a way to keep people sick is to control their resources and distort their value. Therefore, the misuse of power and privilege in devaluing minorities permeate the different layers of environment, community, and individual up to the point in which those oppressed are vulnerable and perpetuate the oppression within themselves, and in their own communities; a

vicious cycle of trauma and re-traumatizing is then recreated from the outside in, and from the inside out.

After listening to the interviewees, cycles of hurt are a significant piece among systems of oppression by keeping people and communities sick through the control of mental health therapeutic models, as well as, through the manipulation of what messages are being sent to the public among mainstream hip hop. By the constant control and manipulation transcending internal and external levels of the individual, authenticity is prohibited and the pursuit for a healthier mind is blocked, even shackled.

Oppression in the Lives of Youth and Lyrics. After learning what oppression meant for the participants; I proceeded asking in what ways have their experiences with BRL influenced their understanding of oppression. Several of the interviewees pointed out how systems of oppression attacked the vulnerable population of youth; through constant forces of control and manipulation, oppression showed itself as prohibiting authenticity and blocking mental/emotional growth.

Another factor which arose was the way Hip Hop lyrics provided a window for how youth of color had encountered inequality, injustice, and other oppressive components. Hip Hop therapy at BRL presented a much more active form - or loud voice - of artistic expression denouncing the harm of oppression. Through lyrics youth engaged in “the process of creating and recognizing that there was a need.” Like in a family, the youth are the ones who create a sense of hope to not replicate the “mistakes” done by their elders. Like in healing, youth are essential in the work of breaking the cycles of hurt driven by oppression. By power and oppression constricting sense of self, it is no surprise then that youth are heavy targets where systems in play take advantage of their vulnerability and malleability. Those at the top then can

stay at the top, and those at the bottom are constantly pushed to stay at the bottom. It was no doubt that for the participants, the voice of youth was recognized as a force to be reckoned with because it provides a guide of where society is and where society needs to go. However, the way oppression and misuse of power affected their lives, show how youth can either be a force for liberation through restoration, or pawns for the perpetuation of pain.

When oppression enters the world of youth, especially in youth of color, it tears apart their families; blinds their education; shackles their resistance; threatens their health; turns them against each other; devalues their dreams and sense of self; stereotypes their appearance; and puts out a loop of distorted messages whose antidote to break free is power and money. And if for some reason youth try to stand up and say “no more,” a brutal bullet of “unworthy” is shot in their hearts and minds where the trigger is inequality, and the one holding the gun is fear.

Community among the Realms of Oppression. With regards to how the participants’ understood and reacted to oppression as members of community; there was a range of experiences across the board based on social positioning, physical location, race, and the spaces participants occupied within community. A couple of participants pointed out in order to move in the realms of oppression, there has to be intentionality on how to mobilize and act based on racial inequalities in society. The fact that for some participants they had to “package” their forms of expression due to their race, in order to be heard is oppressive in itself; therefore, emphasizing how the experiences around oppression shift regarding who the individual is in community and the powers of privilege that come with for example, whiteness versus being a person of color.

Following the experiences of oppression as community members, the interviewees were asked how did they challenge oppression based on their roles within community. The

predominant theme was exchanging knowledge through a wide variety of methods including organizing events, hip hop music, conducting trainings, and being willing to learn and listen. As I listened to each participant, the various forms of knowledge exchange were not birthed through an imposition of power and manipulation of others, but through the side by side joining of people which in return promoted consciousness of what's behind the curtains of ingrained societal structures at play. The opposite of joining is breaking; therefore, by interrupting human connection and blocking the flow of education, white supremacy and oppression will remain holding the reigns in the enslavement of minds through the misuse of power and privilege.

“Fight the Power” through the Daily Living. As the participants and I moved through the interview, the last piece on oppression which I was interested in was how did each individual responded to oppression in their daily lives. The answers encompassed using the jewels of social justice in Hip Hop; the power of artistic expression; being strategic about how to use the spaces we encounter; the strength in connection; intentionality behind voice; and how the response varies depending on who has our back. Many responded having a passion for serving others through Hip Hop, and adopting the mentality that oppression wasn't just an idea, but an actual reality which keeps re-traumatizing those marginalized. It was evident the fact that challenging oppression doesn't have to be solely constricted in big acts of change, but in the small acts of daily living and the integral human connection between one another. Others shared the power of naming in lyricism. Through naming in writing lyrics, the process of self-exploration and exploration of community is restorative; in addition, it increases one's understanding of self in a system that labels people quickly based on race and other social positionalities. Within the social active piece of narrative in Hip Hop, individuals can increase self-awareness and societal

awareness by bringing to light marginalized blind spots; therefore, providing a step forward in not perpetuating oppression.

Factors of picking one's battles, strategizing, and seeing who was there to serve as support also influenced the participants' responses in "fighting the power." The intentionality of how to mobilize combined with who we can count on in solidarity, community, and alliance, served as guiding points for the interviewees when challenging oppression and navigating in shifting spaces. Along with the strategizing, participants shed light on how they used their positionalities, voices, and experiences for self-empowerment and guiding those they serve to empower themselves; thus, using the tools in the master's house for good instead of harm through attunement with self and others.

Oppression devalues the person, the profession, the experience, and makes people lose focus of the journey. Through the experiences shared by the participants, their responses opened a door and set out the path in identifying what ways to unload the heavy baggage of oppression. In the small daily acts of joining, intentionality behind voice, and the strength in connecting with others humanity/spirituality is displayed as powerful forces fighting oppressive mentalities and modalities.

Collective Resistance - Strength in Numbers. Finally, participants were asked how they understood resistance, specifically collective resistance in order to understand what factors served as catalysts for such movement. Major themes that emerged were 1) resistance as proactive human expression against oppression; 2) collective resistance as togetherness; 3) co-creation, education, and space; and 4) strength in numbers through the daily living.

Across the board one factor that became clear was resistance as a "form against the norm;" and collective resistance as "strength in numbers." There are leaders like Dr. King, Cesar

Chavez, Nelson Mandela, Jaime Garzon, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Rigoberta Menchu, Malala Yusafzai - all leaders born in a system where power was not inherently given to them, born in a system where the odds were not in their favor. Nevertheless, they overcame...through the grind and growing pains they overcame. It wasn't through abuse of power, it wasn't through privileged arrogance, and it wasn't through hate for their brothers, sisters, or even oppressors. It was through recognizing that something in the equation of life didn't fit and justice wasn't justice if opportunity only shined on a few. Persian poet Hafez once wrote:

"Even after all this time

The Sun never says to the Earth,

"You owe me."

Look what happens with a love like that,

It lights the whole sky."

Many, if not all, explained they defined *resistance* as standing against the norm; what differed was the forms and shifts of how resistance can be expressed. Also, many interviewees pointed out something inside the human soul is recognizing something is wrong, which then catapults the soul recognition to mental and physical intentional, strategic action. Some further explained on what ignites the action of challenging comes from something inside the individual that knows there is a piece in society which doesn't make sense; something just feels wrong and unsettling. When asking other participants about what resistance meant to them, they also alluded to the notion of resistance as a force against the norm as well as a force against something which impacts the individual.

In addition, one of the characteristics of resistance was movement (whether passive or active) to claim and reclaim authenticity in personal and communal spaces; unlike oppression,

which grabs that very same authenticity and uses it for profit and control. By being conscious about how we associate with spaces, the rules around them, and knowing ourselves inside and outside of them; the tools of intentionality and authenticity as forms of resistance combine. Also, with awareness of self and others, and the consciousness in our authenticity, there is a lower chance of falling or perpetuating to the cycles of hurt. When listening to the participants, there was a loud voice of the necessity to know ourselves and our communities because through the knowledge of self we can move and impact our environments.

Another common factor in resistance was the use of Hip Hop and the active force it provides by “maintaining” authenticity, strength in its collective culture, and an ongoing growth of consciousness. In addition, this awakened nature of self and others provides a shield to not be fooled by oppressive systems in play. Unity provides the strongest form of expression of resistance in which love for ourselves, for others, for nature propels the essence of human connection to catalyze actions of standing up against the status quo of oppression. Stevie Wonder in the Songs in the Key of Life, sang:

“Love's in need of love today

Don't delay

Send yours in right away

Hate's going round

Breaking many hearts

Stop it please

Before it's gone too far” – “Love’s in Need of Love Today”

Therefore, it is imperative and necessary to not only understand what collective resistance is, but in what ways it is represented and how can it be applied to our present day.

Together We Are Better. Themes of “togetherness,” “community,” “sharing of knowledge,” “standing up as team,” and the like were common across the board when participants addressed Collective Resistance. In the small and big acts of collective resistance, each interviewee pointed out there had to be that piece of unity in which the group wasn’t defragmented, but that there was a collective thought and goal. Some pointed out collective resistance is challenging oppressive systems; however, there has to be an agreement in the group of identifying what the oppression is in order to spark transformation for healing.

Throughout the interviews, it was evident there is more strength in numbers instead of facing whatever obstacle individually. Each member of the collective has a human/spiritual/conscious awareness of one another; they each have a different task and different role, yet they come together with their multiple individual authenticities in order to unite under one team not only in representation of themselves, but in the representation of their supporters, community, city, or country. Across the board, the participants touched on collective resistance as a team of authenticities standing on the fields of justice and love in which the opponent is injustice, inequality, economic tyranny, hate, misuse of power, systemic racism, abuse, xenophobia, homophobia, blinded privilege, arrogance, ignorance, and so on - or in other words, systems of oppression.

Another two essential characteristics of collective resistance which came up in the interviews were the “togetherness” *reactivity and proactivity*. Participants clarified how collective resistance needs to be reactive in order to ignite awareness and transformation; however, transformation with no course will leave the group or individual stuck, lost, and hinder healing. Therefore, transformation needs to be proactive for resistance to continue the journey

onward to liberation. What use is there to challenge oppression if we are trying to run with ball and chain? We need to look for the keys to run faster with purpose and strategy in united force where liberation of mind and heart of individual/community is the end goal.

A few of the participants spoke on the power of community and alignment within community that gives collective resistance a certain “kick” to stand out of the norm. Like a tree whose branches grow in freedom, such growth is possible through the deepening of its roots and the strength of its trunk. The tree is in sync, it is aligned - from the roots to the fruit there is constant unity which gives way to growth and healing, as well as the strength to endure strong winds and storms. It is the same for an individual and for a community. Because oppression is then the defragmentation and “cutting” of the trunk, then Collective Resistance is strength in alignment, connection, and attunement.

In terms of Hip Hop and collective resistance, a couple of participants drew attention to Hip Hop’s roots in social justice and social action from black and brown bodies against systemic racism and oppression. This united front of culture and artistic expressions served as a monumental force of collective resistance; in the case of BRL, there was a witnessing of togetherness in the collective narratives and voices through lyrics and flow.

Through the elements of togetherness, reactivity and proactivity, unity, alignment, teamwork, and community, collective resistance is ignited in order to pursuit collective liberation. Malala Yousafzai said: “And if we want to achieve our goal, then let us empower ourselves with the weapon knowledge and let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness.”

Co-Creation in Education & Platforms of Knowledge. In regards to collective resistance as co-creation, education, and spaces for knowledge, the participants pointed out their understanding of collective resistance was shaped by BRL through the way agency provided

space; collective education and knowledge; the act of joining through groups and mentorship; and how they promoted active healing through the power of Hip Hop among youth of color. When serving youth, participants shared how BRL focused on catalyzing healing and happiness through deeper understanding of self, environment, and community through the elements of Hip Hop. By activating healing in the individual, then healing in community is activated as well.

Many shared one form of collective resistance is to interrupt the cycles of hurt throughout the multiple layers encompassing people; that interruption can begin to happen when there's a shared knowledge of what forces at play in the system and how they affect thought, perception, and emotion. When the collective resistance is against self, that's when the individual falls for the lies oppressive systems impose. Therefore, in order to not be fooled and keep going towards "the pursuit of health and happiness," learning and co-creating through humility is key; it's kind of saying "I'm not here to hurt you. Let's work together. I've got some tools that you don't, you've got some tools that I don't so let's do it together." Victimization, blame, and envy for others will continue perpetuating the same system we are trying to fight against.

Throughout, the interviewees expressed how the community experience of witnessing resistance through artistic expression shines light on the co-creation of lyrical narrative between a group of individuals, and how such unity ignites healing by naming the issues communities face. In addition, the fact BRL provides a safe space for youth, staff, and community to interact at such a vulnerable and powerful level through groups and showcases; supplies literally a platform of knowledge exchange from diverse groups which enhances education. The movement of knowledge gives way to forms of collective resistance. Because collective resistance is an active force, it needs the space to move. By staying stagnant the energy has nowhere to go and will lose itself or hurt unity instead of enhancing cohesiveness. Participants noted one of those

spaces to move is within the power of socially conscious music and narrative which allows youth of color being served to speak back on what they're going through in lyrical vulnerability. This platform then allows for community to listen and digest, which then sparks collectivity of thought and joining, and then lead to proactivity of resistance through sharing, knowledge, and action.

In addition, another piece the participants touched on was the concept of teaching by pinpointing the importance of knowledge exchange through a peer to peer approach, not through the top down; thus, igniting youth and staff to learn as they teach, and teach as they learn - or in other words, co-creating in mentorship and education. Through the shared narratives and reciprocal education, collective resistance presented itself in group formation where individual's experience can break free from isolation in the spaces of marginalization. In agencies like BRL, when youth are given the opportunity of united expression, they have the necessary support and inspiration to use platforms in naming their experiences and who they are; thus, collective resistance is ignited. It seemed for all the participants, their understanding of collective resistance was shaped by BRL through the way agency provided space, the act of joining through groups and mentorship, and how they promoted active healing through the power of Hip Hop lyric and flow among youth of color; which makes the entity of BRL as collective resistance in itself among the realms of "one-size fits all" popular type of approach in the field of social services.

Collective Action & Justice in the Daily Living: "We Gon' Be Alright". Regarding the theme of collective action and justice in the interviewees' daily lives, many shared practicing it through movements, protests, and group gatherings standing up for justice. Some participants shared their experiences of collective movement through Black Lives Matter and how their roles in collective resistance impacted different layers in their lives; some expressed how their roles

changed from being a student versus being an employee and the constrictions, or freedoms, around those roles. It was interesting to see through the participants how with the switch of spaces, came the switch of roles. In order to be part of collective action, the individual's strategy has to change; which touches back on intentionality and strategizing of movement for our collective voices to be a presence in the big or small - both are important. Also, because some spaces are more constricting than others, joining with others is essential due to different roles provide different abilities and opportunities, just like in a team.

Another factor in collective resistance through the power of voice, was the fact it sheds light on the importance of alignment in thought, feeling, and intention in order for collective voice to not only happen, but to be heard. Through the soundwaves of unity, individuals can realign with their identities of self, create new ideas, ignite courage through vulnerability, inspire in love, and bring power in authenticity.

Others spoke of witnessing it among community where elders and youth engage in united growth and stories. Collecting stories, presenting them, and taking them back to the higher governing body demonstrates the importance of testimony, use of social positioning, and how collection of stories is also a form of unity. Some participants witnessed collective resistance through BRL's program, The Academy, where youth are taught the tools of therapy and Hip Hop by integrating both in concept and practice. By teaching and providing the space, opportunity, and skills through the language of Hip Hop therapy, there is a passing of knowledge between clinicians, artists, and youth. This passing of knowledge then can serve as a fluid exchange where authenticities come to play in collectivity; the exchange of education is extremely empowering by enhancing growth, exploration of identity, awareness of purpose, intentionality of movement, and guidance in self and togetherness.

An interesting piece some participants touched on was how their individual experiences actually allowed them to join with other youth at a level that would not have been possible before; therefore, enhancing the healing factor of role shifting in power dynamics instead of perpetuating damage, which provide a bridge of dialogue and healing through joining. In addition, the piece of roles and space as collective resistance pointed out the importance of checking one's own privilege, power, and social positioning. Several participants expressed how their awareness allowed them to become allies, partners, and players in enhancing unity in collective resistance. The shift of mentality through physical location gave way to shift in relationship which tapped into reciprocity between staff and youth, especially in social services systems where leveling power dynamics is often frowned upon. Such coalition of individuals gives way to togetherness and depicts collective resistance from a formation as small as two people dialoguing, to protesting in larger groups.

Others spoke about experiencing collective resistance in positive and negative ways depending the intention of the movement. At times for some participants, their role of authority caused for groups of people to resist against them; however, the participants were aware that the opposition wasn't personal but more coming from systems that induce stress, frustration, and deviate the collective purpose which is benefitting others instead of pushing each other down. A way to address such collective rupture was to go back to basics and refocus purpose. Once again, what comes up for the interviewees is the forms of collective resistance changes as roles change; even if it's trying to benefit others there will be a push back. Therefore, the question becomes how can we work as a team and not bite one another.

By having awareness of positionality, heart, mind, systems at play, and consciousness of the humanity of self and others; individuals can provide ideas and solutions where maybe the

system won't immediately change, but the collective approach will by causing a wave for justice and planting seeds of healing. For all participants, witnessing and practicing collective resistance not only caused external, physical movement but internal transformation of spirit, heart, and mind in which the determination and intentionality for justice in togetherness births hope.

Research Implications. This project aimed to explore and document how BRL serves as catalyst for collective resistance, through the understanding of Hip Hop, Oppression and Power, and Collective Resistance. Through naming the transformative social justice factors of Hip Hop and artistic expressions, along with the devastating impact of systemic oppression, misuse of power, and unchecked privilege; the hope is that the study may guide and continue inspiring future research on how entities, communities, and individuals can wisely mobilize in the fight for social/spiritual liberation. In addition, by pointing out some of the driving forces in collective resistance, as well as, the role BRL plays within each different realm; the acknowledgement and consciousness will hopefully call attention to the importance of uniting with marginalized, devalued, disfranchised, peoples and form proactive solidarity.

This research analysis is understood as a first step in understanding this notion of collective resistance within BRL and other similar community based mental health agencies. Future research would benefit from interviews with youth being served at the agency, as well as, engaging physically with youth, members of the community, and staff at BRL. Doing so would allow for a better and more inclusive understanding of the impact Hip Hop, BRL, oppression, and collective resistance has had on youth of color, especially because their voices bring innovative knowledge and value in the movements for social justice. Also, engaging physically would open a door of trust, co-creation, learning, and human connection.

Social Work Implications. Across the board, staff members, community members, and artists all believed that BRL and its roots of social action imbedded in Hip Hop represent the exception and not the norm. Within the field of social work, the misuse of power and privilege often perpetuate systems of oppression. Therefore, as social workers and clinicians, it is essential to *join*, learn, and listen to those we are serving - and most importantly, to not underestimate the value or power in the veins of youth of color. Throughout the study, it was awe inspiring to listen to the way youth, staff, and community were collectively transformed when making and providing the space for authentic freedom.

As social workers and clinicians working in the field of social services, it is fundamental to act upon the power of Collective Resistance and check our own social positions of power and privilege in order to not pathologize others just because of our own frustrations, or misunderstandings. Collective Resistance would be a step in practicing culturally sensitive social work, co-create interventions that are culturally attuned and grounded in the daily lives of clients, and engage in lateral teaching/learning field with those we work and serve. Finally, it is important to understand the role Hip Hop culture as artistic expression against oppression and social justice, has played in the history of this country, in the lives of black and brown bodies, in the voice it provides for those marginalized, and how it serves as a catalyst when used in spaces such as BRL for Collective Resistance and Liberation.

Limitations. Limitations to this phenomenological and narrative study was limited sample size and participant bias. The limited samples size was due to time constraints around the study, as well as it was harder to obtain a more substantial pool sample based on I was doing the research long distance. As for participant bias, some were employed at BRL and others were closely connected to the agency; therefore, the answers were influenced due to their affiliations. In

addition, the lack of participation of youth of color being served at BRL due to methodological limitations also provided a limited understanding of BRL and collective resistance, and in some ways, this replicated the power structures that BRL aims to challenge. Through the awareness of the limited sample size and participant bias, the sample for this research cannot be considered representative of the population as a whole, nor does it aim to be. Instead, this study aims to give voice to a few community leaders in the BRL community and recommends that future work focus on the voice of youth.

Another limitation centers around the researcher of this study. Being that I was conducting a long-distance research, I didn't have the opportunity to be physically present not only with those I interviewed, and I wasn't able to participate in some of the BRL events such as showcases, or interact more with the youth. In addition, being a member of the Hip Hop community, a person of color, and a passionate enthusiast for social action, I intentionally tried to be as neutral as possible when analyzing data through the use of mentorship and peer debriefing; however, some bias may have influenced the process of the study, particularly when conducting the thematic analysis.

Because Hip Hop, Oppression, and Collective Resistance are constant ongoing systems; this study provides a small window on the characteristics of each theme; however, the research does not encompass the *whole* of each category due to time, and the profound impact they all play in society. Moving forward, this study will be continued by other students in order to continue on the beauty and importance of collective resistance.

Conclusion. By tapping into the power of Hip Hop culture, using and providing space for authentic exploration and solidification, and having awareness of positionality, thought, and oppressive systems at play, individuals are able to provide ideas and solutions where maybe the

system won't change but the collective approach will. The difference in approaching the negative and positive is whether we approach through fear versus love: what would it look like if instead of fighting fist with fist, it would be fist embraced by open palm. It is imperative to shift conflicting forces because, at the end of the day, people at their very core want to be loved, shown respect, be treated fairly, justly, and with equality. With Collective Resistance, there is a need to keep the goal in mind in order to not turn fear inward which will give birth to harm. Instead, by acting upon the common goal of goodness for all, community can continue riding on healing love.

Part of collective resistance does not stay in the physicalities or in the intellect. Part of collective resistance goes beyond into the emotional and even spiritual realms; what we see is temporary, but what we don't see is permanent. Love, forgiveness, wisdom, healing, hope, faith, humbleness, mutual respect, friendship - each one by itself serves as incredibly enduring roots and fruits of resistance. Each one as a unit, as a team, as a collective, serves as a catalyst for social justice beyond resistance, which is liberation. Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years being in prison said: "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

*"Tu nos dices que debemos sentarnos
Pero las ideas solo pueden levantarnos
Caminar, recorrer, no rendirse ni retroceder
Ver, aprender como esponja absorber
Nadie Sobra, todos faltan, todos suman
Todos para todos, todo para nosotros
Soñamos en grande que se caiga el imperio
Lo gritamos alto, no queda mas remedio
Esto no es utopia, es alegre rebedia
Del baile de los que sobran, de la danza tuya y mia
Levantarnos para decir "ya basta"
Ni Africa, ni América Latina se subasta*

*Con barro, con casco, con lápiz, zapatear el fiasco
Provocar un social terremoto en estate charco”
Ana Tijoux ft. Shadia Mansour, “Somos Sur”*

*“You tell us that we have to sit down
But ideas can only lift us up
Walk, march, don’t surrender or retreat
See, learn like a sponge absorb
No one is surplus, all fall short, all add up
All for all, all for us
We dream big that the empire may fall
We shout out loud, there is no other remedy left
This is not utopia, this is a joyful dancing rebellion
Of those who are overrun, this dance is yours and mine
Let’s rise to say “enough is enough”
Neither Africa or Latin America are for auction
With mud, with a helmet, with a pencil, drum the fiasco
To provoke a social earthquake in this puddle”
Ana Tijoux ft. Shadia Mansour, “We Are South”*

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Appendix A

Consent Form for Participants



2015-2016

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA

.....
Title of Study: How Does Hip Hop Serve as a Catalyst for Collective Resistance? “Fight the Power” – a Beats, Rhymes, & Life Approach.

Investigator(s):

Maria Camila Camacho, Smith College School of Social Work.
.....

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study on how BRL can influence communities to fight against oppression together, or in other words, collective resistance.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you identify either as a former graduate of BRL and are over 18 years of age; as a member of BRL’s Board of Directors; or, as a community member in Oakland, CA, that has been impacted by BRL, or is related to members of individuals participating with BRL.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is how BRL as program that is involved heavily with the community, ignites collective resistance among its members.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master’s in social work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: I will be contacting you by phone or email to schedule a phone or skype interview and clarify the need to have a quiet and private space to conduct the interview. On the day of our interview, I will send the informed consent electronically and ensure that informed consent has been signed. I will then call you at the time of the interview, remind you that the discussion is being recorded, clarify any questions about informed consent, and complete the interview. The interview will take approximately 1 – 1 ½ hrs and we will meet once. At the end I will thank you for your participation and ask if there are any questions or need for clarification.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study has the following risks. Because you will be asked about some of your encounters with oppression as well as personal experiences, some individuals may feel discomfort during the interview. Because of this, you have no obligation to answer all of the interview questions and may leave at any point throughout the meeting.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefits of participation are to have another area where you can use your voice and speak on matters that are important to you regarding Hip Hop and community. Also, because the study is on collective resistance, it will provide the opportunity to gain more insight about it and what is your role in this movement; therefore, through naming and knowledge you can continue to empower yourself and others.
- The benefits to social work/society are: The research will aid the social work field in understanding more what community-based intervention is and how it can look like through the lens of collective resistance, Hip Hop, and family. This could potentially influence other social workers in implementing different models as well as engage with the power of community and apply it in their own work.

Confidentiality

- Your participation will be kept confidential. We will be meeting via phone or Skype and you will be given pseudonyms in order to protect your identity. Those who will know about this study will be Dr. Dadlani and I. In addition, records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. The interview will be recorded for transcribing purposes; however, the recording will be kept in a private external drive at home, and your assigned pseudonyms will be used throughout the transcription texts and process. A master list of identifying information will be stored on paper at BRL HQ in a locked filing cabinet. The only people who will have access to this material are Dr. Dadlani and I. All material will be erased and destroyed after I have completed my thesis which will be by the end of July, 2016.
- All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.
- I will be the only one transcribing the confidential information.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* (up to the date noted below) without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by 4/1/2016. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Maria Camila Camacho (Maki) by telephone at (redacted). If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

.....

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

.....

[if using audio or video recording, use next section for signatures:]

1. I agree to be [audio or video] taped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Letter to BRL Staff, Community Members, and Artists

Dear...:

My name is Maria Camila Camacho (“Maki”). I am currently completing my Masters Thesis at Smith College School for Social Work and am working with BRL to evaluate BRL programs and better understand how BRL uses Hip Hop to support Healing. As a lover of Hip Hop and a social worker, the work you are a part of at BRL inspires me and strikes a chord in my own life. I’m excited to hear your voices and to support your work as a member of the BRL community.

The project I am working on is focused on understanding how BRL ignites Collective Resistance and how BRL has played a role in your experiences at BRL and beyond. Your participation in this study will require use to speak on the phone for about an hour, and I will ask you a series of questions to help focus our conversation. The study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

If you would like to participate in the study or hear more about the goals of the study, please contact me at INSERT SMITH EMAIL and Phone Number.

I want to emphasize how appreciative I am of your consideration and for being part of this journey. I truly believe in the power of Community/Familia, and I feel honored by the possibility of “sitting down” with you and hearing about how BRL has impacted you.

Thank you once again for considering participation in this study! Muchas gracias!

Much love and peace,

Sincerely,

Maki Camacho

Appendix C

BRL Flyer

HOW DOES BRL “FIGHT THE POWER”?! HOW DO YOU “FIGHT THE POWER”?!

Let’s find out together!

If you are a member of BRL’s TAGS or Academy & want to join a
group discussion about

Hip Hop,
Community, and
Resistance,

Please contact a BRL staff member for more information

Or

Contact Maki Camacho (mcamacho@smith.edu; [REDACTED])



BE PART OF A MOVEMENT!!

“We gotta make a change

It's time for us as a people to start making some changes

Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live

And let's change the way we treat each other

You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do

What we gotta do to survive” – *Tupac Shakur*

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social
Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

Appendix D

Interview Questions

First we are going to talk Hip Hop and BRL Broadly

1. What does Hip Hop represent to you in your life?
2. How has BRL influenced your understanding of Hip Hop?
3. In what ways, if any, has BRL impacted your life through Hip Hop?
4. How do you view yourself as a member of BRL?

Now we are going to talk a little bit about the ideas of resistance and oppression

5. One of things I'm interested in is how you think about resistance. Can you give me a brief definition of what that means to you? (If needed: If you don't have any ideas, we can define it together.)
6. Similarly, how would you define collective resistance?
7. In what ways, if any, would you say that your experience at BRL has shaped your understanding of collective resistance?
8. Based on your understanding on collective resistance, do you have examples of either practicing or witnessing collective resistance in your life?
9. Another thing I'm interested in is how you think about oppression. Can you give me a brief definition of what that means to you? (If needed: If you don't have any ideas, we can define it together.)
10. In what ways have your experiences with BRL shaped your understanding of oppression?
11. How do you respond to this form of oppression in your daily life? What has influenced this response? (probe for role of BRL if not stated)
12. F/u: Some of what you've talked about is how oppression shows up for you as an individual. One of the things I'm wondering is how that shapes your understanding about being a member of a group (community, program, etc.) that responds against oppression.

Thank you for these thoughts so far. Now we are going to talk a little bit about how BRL

has shaped other areas of your life.

13. Since joining BRL, in what areas do you feel you've grown or haven't grown because of your membership? F/U: Could you share more on your experience before and after?
14. One way we learn things is through our daily experiences. Has your engagement with BRL helped you gain knowledge from your daily, lived experiences?
15. In what ways has your experience with BRL influenced your understanding of family? In what ways has it not?
16. Has your experience with BRL shaped your understanding of community? If so, in what ways has it influenced your understanding? In what ways has it not?
17. Does your role at BRL influence how you view yourself in family and the community?
18. Do you get a sense of "team" at BRL? If so, in what ways is the sense of "team" at BRL represented? If not, in what ways is the sense of "team" not represented?
19. In what ways do you inspire each other at BRL? Are there ways in which you inspire each other at BRL? What could BRL do that doesn't already
20. In what ways, if at all, does BRL promote your artistic expression? How do your artistic expressions reflect who you are as an individual and as a member of BRL?

Appendix E

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 25, 2016

Maria Camacho

Dear Maria,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mamta Dadlani, Research Advisor